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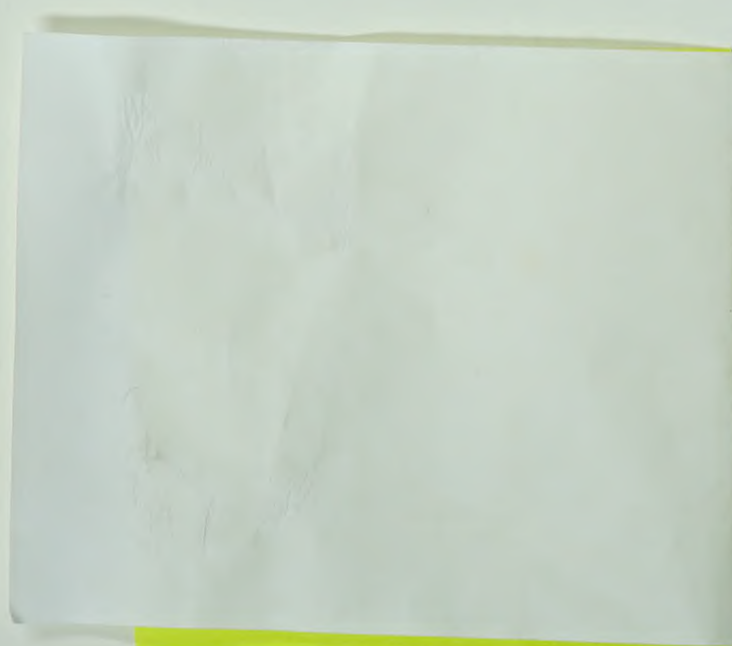
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

NO SWEET LAND

BY



DAVID JOHN SCHLEICH

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,
for acceptance, a thesis entitled NO SWEET LAND submitted by
David John Schleich in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The land is alien to the "frontierless generation" of the 1960's in Canada. What his society sees as a necessary and proud victory over the land, Ford Percy Giffen sees as a mindless and deadly submission to the "western world view" which can only ruin the land.

Within a landscape of economic abundance and established mastery over the earth, Ford searches for some consistent depth and durability in his relationship with his environment, and in his relationships with his contemporaries. He is a sensitive student of his land's history and he is trying to find an alternative, more authentic mode of life on that land, a mode that might lift away the apocalyptic malaise which he feels plagues the first generation in Canada with no frontiers left to conquer and with no will to search for substitutes.

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for Henry Schleich, 1893-1970

. . . But now
That the forests are cut down, the rivers charted,
Where can you turn, where can you travel? Unless
Through the desperate wilderness behind your eyes,
So full of falls and glooms and desolations . . .

-- Douglas LePan
'Coureurs de bois '

Part One

1

Anonymous little boys had pulled the bark from the elm tree down below in Ford's back yard. They ripped it in chunks from the ground up, as high as they could reach. They also climbed up into the tree and broke its branches where possible. Now some living parts of the tree were like picked scabs on a boy's elbow: pulpy wet oval areas surrounded by receding, dying bark. The same violent boys had flung the severed branches up into low-hanging telephone, cable T.V., and hydro wires. Three feet up the trunk from the hard-earth yard two boys now hammered a rusted spike into the wood with a two-by-four: whack! whack! whack!

"What the hell are they building?" Ford asked Valerie, not expecting her to respond.

She was pouring hot water into two mugs on the counter.

He looked back down at the yard: so small and pathetic, grass in brownish splotches, an ancient cedar fence whose wide boards enclosed in one corner a children's swing, and in the other the dilapidated elm.

All around and generally filling the view from the kitchen window, buildings tall and small: sheds, old apartment houses, converted WW I homes now four-family circuses; and scattered across the tableau were baby buggies, ten-year-old cars with brush-stroke home-done paint jobs, discarded bike frames, wooden garbage stands, and always some blue or grey or white for day; and below, the local flux of back roadway. All taking up measured, guarded feet of eight dollar per square foot prime income dirt.

"Dying," he said, turning around to observe Valerie.

"What?"

"Dying," Ford repeated, "the elm's dying. Goddam kids have stripped the bark off. Now they're pounding spikes into it. They won't leave it alone."

He looked back out the window: inflated rents, bubbles that never burst, he mused. He saw the buildings out there as gold mines for mineral-hungry European men with rugged wives who came to Toronto for a piece of the North American productive economy. Every time he thought about immigrants with income property Ford abhorred them; because he figured they came knowing exactly what they wanted. They immigrate with timetables, he often said to Colby; and then ten years later they go back to the old country to show off to those who stayed behind.

Ford stirred his coffee. In the yard two stories below one of the boys directed a urine stream over the elm's barkless lower trunk. His companion then managed to wet the trunk up to where the bark began again.

"First they pound the shit out of it and then they piss all over it," he scowled.

Their bladders empty, the boys aimed at Niccolo Annis' seven-year-old daughter. She was too interested to retreat shrieking into the first floor flat that her family inhabited. One of the boys subsequently tugged at her white underpants until she yielded, giggling. Denise Annis held the front of her blue dress high against her chest, her little belly and legs white, unnaturally white for a Mediterranean girl. But

soon, perhaps tiring of the game or afraid of discovery, she pulled up her pants and ran toward the broken sidewalk at the side of the building. The boys resumed their hammering.

"I should get Annis to cut it down before it falls down," Ford said.

Valerie was pouring Kellogg's Corn Flakes into a bowl.

As he spoke he heard Mrs. Higgins, a grampus perenniel in Niccolo's building, calling for her cat. He could hear her tromping up and down the hall. From one end of it her gravel-voice erupted into a curse. Late at night Ford often heard her come home with her men and the same growling curses boomed in the hall between the apartments. Grunting like some costive cow she would splutter and shuffle about in front of her door trying to remember where she had stashed the key. Then the voices would disappear. In the morning the relentless fuss of her search for her cat rattled the walls of the entire building. Meanwhile, Ford imagined, Mrs. Higgins' cat avoided and evaded its mistress, consistently recalcitrant, prowling the yards and fences of the neighborhood. Once he had found it sprawled on the lady's welcome mat, exhausted and starving.

"She's been on another bender," Valerie said sarcastically.

Valerie's sudden comment surprised Ford: the unspoken and habitual morning tension thick between them clear to him by the way he could not follow up her assertion. He wanted to say 'so what?' or 'why do you always have to be sarcastic about her?', but there was no energy, no motivation. He sat down at the table and stared up at the sound of feet clomping across the ceiling.

One floor above, a person of curiosity, Francis D. Weaver, eclectic middle-aged student from the University of Toronto, spent time with Valerie whenever he could

"He's after your ass, that's all," Ford had said often enough to Valerie.

"Anybody that shows any interest in me's always after my ass."

When Ford thought about the eccentric Frank he often ended up ridiculing him verbally.

"He fancies he's aware of all the intricacies of jargon and manner that people use in order to get along. He's a late bloomer, very late."

"Why can't you just let him be?" Valerie usually replied.

"So what do I do?"

"You don't do anything friendly, that's for sure."

Francis D. Weaver was as calculating as he was bold. He said one morning to Valerie before he knew her, "Hello, I'm Frank. I live upstairs." And they stood for several mornings waiting for a trolley together. Soon he said: "Walk you to the car stop?" This morning, habitually, he would knock on Ford's door and Valerie would ride as far as Spadina in his company.

"He's harmless," Ford would say.

"You'd like to think everybody's harmless, wouldn't you?"

"It's fear of failure! He figures you might laugh at him if he tried to jump you."

"Why is everything so blatant and vulgar to you? How can you be so sure what his intentions are? You weren't exactly patient and gentlemanly when I met *you*!"

When he met her Ford had nicknamed her Hela, Norse goddess of death, and had told her about the Altamiran caves and the rocks of Tassili eight thousand years old. He impressed her by recounting the subject matter of his history thesis about the social and economic conditions in Upper Canada culminating in the 1837 rebellions. As he talked and drank twenty-cent draughts she watched him closely, uncertain whether to take him seriously or not. He finally sighed at her silence: "You are a wraith of Norse magic, madam." "Either that or she didn't understand a word you said," Clare Colby blared back across the table to his friend a few days later while Ford described Valerie Chiswin and her performance in bar and bed. "I think I'm in love," Ford had said drunkenly. "If I thought that," Colby replied tersely, "I'd have you castrated instantly. So what's the big deal a broad gets her pudenda scuffed?" Colby was an irascible dealer, quick with advice for living without torment on the fringes of urban Canadian society.

In the kitchen Ford watched Valerie chewing her toast. She always ate big breakfasts, washing down eggs and cereal with a large glass of cold milk. When she stood up to put the milk carton away he looked at her buttocks. They were still distracting, attracting.

"It's all biology, baby, for you and for them," Colby had said in the bar.

The day after meeting Valerie Ford had written to his new stepmother.

Toronto, Ontario.
June 21, 1969.

Dear Elizabeth:

Congratulations on your nuptial knot. Ol' Ern's going to be a handful. Me, I'm working hard and my bowels are open. In a dark wood where the straight way was lost there am I. Don't get rattled great stepmaw: the world of urban dunder-heads here in bigtown Canada won't corrupt your anchorite this week. Please tell ol' Ern' to send money.

Love, your step-son

Ford

A few weeks later he and Valerie moved into Annis' building together. Colby found out. He charged: "You know what, Ford-fuck-face, you're a bastard. You just want somebody to carry you till you get that goddam degree done. Right? How long you going to keep her around? Afraid to be alone at night or something?"

"She'll stay as long as she wants, as long as she expects."

"How long you going to use her?"

"It's not a question of *using* people, Col'."

"It isn't?"

"No. You've just got to arrange with yourself to deal with their expectations. You deal with their goddam expectations."

"She'll press you. You let them into the house longer than a day and they start changing your schedule."

"It's all biology and expectations, Col'."

After that both men had continued to drink draught after draught in silence.

In the kitchen Valerie blew a smoke ring across the table. She had a puffed, bleached, morning face. Little wrinkles across her forehead and tiny crow's feet at her eyes: permanent erosions.

"Has the mail come?" Ford asked.

"What are you expecting?"

"I ordered a book from Blackwells."

Valerie frowned.

"Are you going to work on your thesis today?" she asked.

"Why?" he responded looking directly into her face. She was frowning acrimoniously.

"Well you've got to do *something* soon, don't you? Every day you poke at that damn thesis and spend money on paperback books and you don't get any closer to anything."

"There's no hurry; there's nothing to get close to."

"That's fine while I pay the rent."

"We've been through it. I need the books for my work."

"I'm tired of waiting."

"Don't wait."

"Jesus!"

Her grimace said she regretted trying to discuss it again. It always dangled at the tip of her exchanges with him. She took another cigarette out of the green Export A pack.

"I don't want to give them my soul," Ford offered.

"Soul! Soul! It's got nothing to do with your stupid soul. Do you think I want to work in that damn office for the rest of my life? Or for the rest of this week for that matter?"

"If you choose to you might. If you choose not to, you might not."

"So what am I supposed to do when Annis comes up looking for rent? He knows enough now to ask *me* for it. Or do you figure we'll go on welfare or something?"

"It's a possibility I haven't excluded for myself."

"Yourself. What about *myself*? Why don't you talk to me straight about this? Jesus! What did you do for money before I came along?"

"I forget."

She reached across the table and scooped up his mug.

"You want more coffee?"

She poured it for him, her eyes fixed to the stained mug. He looked out the window again as she jumped up with the knock that came at their door. Valerie knew she had stopped short, afraid to force the moment to its crisis.

"Frank's here. Can you take the roast out of the fridge before I get home? Christ, why did you buy *that* roast? Four dollars. You could've bought pork."

"Frank's here," Ford answered turning around.

There was a glib grin on Weaver's face, confident, and at first glance, unchallengeable. Each move he made seemed relaxed and familiar but Ford saw through to the moment to moment nervousness under the aggressive guise. Weaver's pants were brown and wrinkled like an old shopping bag. He wavered between expecting a blast which never came and acknowledging the indifferent nod which always did. He glanced furtively toward Ford every few seconds. Then he watched Valerie walk past him toward the bedroom.

"Morning Frank," Ford said. He stared at Weaver, deliberately making him uncomfortable.

Weaver's moustache was carefully manicured; his jaw tense and invidious, the lower lip as immobile as the upper, as if the hairs under his nose must not be disturbed.

Valerie came back into the kitchen. She was in her underwear, unconcerned that Weaver stared. Weaver had sense enough to know that his presence added to the strain in the room. And he also realized that something was strangely inconsistent about Ford's indifference, his casualness about Valerie. For a long time he attributed the silence to arrogance, then to the despair that befalls earnest graduate students whose theses go seriously overtime. Finally it perplexed him. Much after the fashion of Valerie, although independently of her, he was on his guard not to press Ford about his thoughts. Instead, he talked to Valerie about his suspicions. One time he described Ford to her as a dissembler who sidled around people ready to mesmerize them with his silence and subterfuge.

"Maybe he's just run out of steam and doesn't give a good goddam. We're reading a lot into it," Weaver suggested.

"He's always watching," Valerie replied with a quick and eager readiness that made Weaver marvel at her varying loyalties.

Suddenly the telephone rang in the bedroom. Valerie went for it.

"Ford, long distance!" she called back.

Ford left Weaver in the kitchen. In the bedroom Valerie was buttoning her variegated blouse, Ford noticing how tightly the front of the colourful shirt fitted across her breasts.

Simcoe's vision: Southwestern Ontario as the centre and guts of a vast new trade assembly in North America. And with his lieutenants he cursed the Yankee rebels, their prowling democracy and egalitarian Protestantism! He decided, inchoate optimist that he was, that the settlements west of the Alleghanies would join Britain's mercantile Empire. The peninsula between the lakes: Upper Canada, would be the jumping off point to "the grand Mart and Emporium of the Western World," London. So, he started a new London, on a new Thames. Even his successor, Russell, focussed energetically on the sweet land of the Huron Tract, the land of the Six Nations, the land of Talbot, the land of York. Old visions, startling to imagine now that waterways no longer make such strange trade-fellows.

In Colme, north of London, quiet, a small town, blessed by declining population in an urban age, humid, Presbyterian-Calvinist by design, Dr. Clyde Jarry drove toward Elizabeth Giffen's house. The air in his car was hot. He opened all the power windows of his Buick, the precise and shiny simile of his social status in Colme. Today he wished that he hadn't mistrusted Karl Duffus' smooth pitch about air-conditioning, custom-cool, GM mark of expensive excellence, delivered in mid-winter when he had ordered the car. He drove over the main street of the town, the Owen Sound Road in Simcoe-Russell days. At Harris' stationary store he double-parked long enough to pick up his *Globe and Mail*. Miss Harris rang up the sale and handed him his change.

"Ernie Giffen," he replied to her uplifted forehead.

She made an 'o' with her lips and nodded.

Colme, near the great lake of the Huron Indian, Ford had explained to Valerie early in their relationship. Before Confederation and Colonel Thomas Talbot's settlement duties, he told her. A company town in the London District, Canada Company finally defunct only fifteen years ago wheeling and dealing the road lots all the way up to Bruce. It was a slow, pressured, land-hungry move, he explained, right along the Niagara Escarpment north to Bruce; unless, impatient or wagon-weary or both, a settler stopped at Colme, down off the ridge toward the lake. Professional squatters: Professional? she had asked -- Yes, professional! They chopped trees and built crude shanties, genuine Huron Tract wilderness at 7s. 6d. Squatting even though they were told it wasn't open to settlement, not yet! They came to buy 200 acre lots -- Ahem! for immediate and continuous occupation; that is, in the surveyed tracts only gentlemen. Officers first 500 acres apiece, Ford explained. Enlisted men, wait your turn.

Ford told her that in Colme crown land agents had made first title easy: the chequered plan with 200 acre patents. Simcoe wanted it done *fast*, Ford said, and his dream of reuniting the western settlements of the U.S. to a prosperous Upper Canada had to be realized while the Mississippi was kept closed by Spain, the dream deferred in the end by more pragmatic and less visionary Europeans. In Colme men claimed uncleared land all along the Menesetung while Tiger Dunlop looked on and counted his pounds, Ford had chuckled.

The hills around Colme were gold-green in spring and browning lightly by July. In the little valley town, especially in mid-summer,

an oppressive humid summer air stuck; then, and now, by day, the humidity still stifling the uninitiated. Earlier a man had had to believe: that the decade of work was worth the roots, the community, the title clear. The fifty cleared acres sucked in his blood and his youth. He cleared his road lot stump by stump and remained loyal to George and Ann. Maybe braver or stronger, other men moved on, north to the Bay, a cooler and greener promised land, away from Talbot's duties, away from the speculators of the Canada company. Or, younger, no wives or children, they followed the two-centuries-old voyageur routes with Selkirk across the Lakehead and into Fort Garry to file for Red River land in a new province. They were all looking for a home in the sweet new land, while England grew and Simcoe's dream perished. Ford made it sound like a story to Valerie.

Clyde Jarry was a doctor and grandson of a doctor. He knew Katherine, Ernie's first wife. He knew Katherine's father. He knew Katherine's children. He had known them all, all his life, and their images flashed at him constantly as he drove. Even now, though, after so much, Ernie seemed an outsider.

Clyde Jarry had never seen the thick hardwood forests his own grandfather had spoken of. He had never chopped at them to make a life.

*In the darkness the fields
defend themselves with fences
in vain:*

*everything
is getting in*

And never having felt such threats, he could drive his Buick out of Colme along the main street which turned into Highway No. 4 and seldom wonder why the rusted cans and milkshake containers, constant specks in the ditch, were not inevitable inhabitants of that land. He turned west on No. 86. The afternoon sun was still too high to meet him head on. To the west, along fence lines, dying elms against the red, grey and brittle in a surrealist landscape, dying here of the European disease. Roads, plowed fields and disease claimed them until they were sentries, naked with clenched hands and rigid feet, gaping mouth, trunks crawling with worms, on duty near Colme, Clyde Jarry's islet of a town in the western land.

For Jarry the time passed in people and their affairs, not in any consciousness of painful changes to the land. Katherine's father flashed at him as he drove, Katherine; Ford, flashed at him with broken arms and measles . . . and the family was linear, some trajectory of people always there, differently, in a vague landscape.

He passed a field where over the years of plowing, harrowing, discing, some farmer had gone around the tattered hulk of an old horse-drawn plow partly hidden in tall grass, taking care not to snag new machinery in the old. Gaunt handles stuck out like bones behind the wide brown blade. And all around and as far across fence lines as Jarry could see from his car in the quick postcard panoramas, the land spread neatly, continuously, efficiently. Corn, oats, barley, market garden vegetables, rowed, tilled, weeded, tended, annually straining toward the harvest.

A few miles west No. 86 climbed gradually, an undulation in the rolling, easy terrain, until for a moment there was a perspective through the car window which shot to Lake Huron: the blue so prominent along the western horizon, so familiar north-south-east-west at land's end in Southwestern Ontario where highways, paths, farmer's fields all end at lakes. He had passed often over that hill and in winter the white-grey sky and the white fields might be shades of each other as far as the horizon, an eerie limbo from the driver's seat. But always, the landscapes Jarry knew were familiar and unchanging. In high summer the same terrain in green, unthreatening, tamed fields sprawling checkerboards of green, brown, yellow, black, with silver silos sticking up, fingers pointing at the sun. And red-brown barns near the explosion of trees and shrubs surrounding every farmer's brick house.

Jarry never considered how new the sun was to the black earth so long shaded by maples and oaks squeezing each other out. There were the open fields in owned squares, every square foot planned and primed for profit. There were the leafless grey elms stark against any horizon; and occasionally, rusted hulks like the old plow, remnants of the earlier days on the land.

For Jarry there were no ghosts on these landscapes. He was thinking about Ernie living in the old house on River Road with Katherine; and now, the same Ernie, without her, so far away from the easy, settled street -- Ernie exposed, isolated somehow out here in Elizabeth's house. And in town the old River Road house stood empty.

A young Cocker Spaniel yapped at the Buick as it pulled up the gravel drive. The doctor ignored the dog and walked directly to the front

door. From the doorway he could see where the river came out and met the highway to the west of Elizabeth's house. He could see the highway dipping, darting toward the lake. Finally Jarry passed in one uninterrupted movement from the outside of the house to the bed where Ernie Giffen was dying.

In the Colme District Hospital Clyde Jarry always had a nurse to speak to, other nearby rooms and appointments to escape to. In the bedroom he had only Elaine Giffen's dumb stare and Elizabeth Giffen's hand-wringing, oppressive weakness. Elaine, Ernie's daughter, stood near the door. Elizabeth, Ernie's second wife, stood near the bed. She watched the doctor's hands. The morphine injection took the routine part of a minute. In the bedroom as in the hospital ward, the doctor was quick in his treatment, quick in his judgments, quick with his conclusions. Elaine looked on mutely.

"Take it out! Take it out!" her father had cried. A year and a half at home, mending from the accident, deteriorating from the cancer. "We found traces, only traces," they had said after his car accident. The traces became obvious ugly welts. "Take it out!" Ernie cried in the hospital bed. The nurse coaxed him to let her reset the intravenous attachment. In the hospital ward Elaine stared at what seemed to her an ugly phallic apparatus. A tube like those in the bellies of squirrels she and Ford had cleaned one summer with him in Colme hung limply from a bottle which contained thick white liquid. The attachment itself was taped clumsily to the inside of her father's arm, blue-black stains circumnavigating the atom-hole where the needle disappeared into a rubbery vein. Her father's hand lay palm-up, the

fingers bent and helpless, the skin shiny, tough-looking, the nails hard and uncut. He had wrapped the string attached to the nurse signal around and around the index finger of his free hand. He clung to it with an irreversible attention. The string was so tight that his finger was often blue and puffed. If the nurse diplomatically took the string from him he doggedly got his hand up and behind to find it again. And one day Elaine learned how an old man with cancer scraping at his intestines can be like a baby in a diaper, going back to the beginning. Grasping the string was grasping some vague honour.

"It's all right," the nurse was saying sweetly.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," her father sobbed.

Behind the drawn curtains the nurse worked efficiently. Suddenly an arm flinging a sheet into the bin beside the bed. Elaine saw, and when the nurse wheeled the bedclothes hamper past, she smelled the copper-red voiding of her father's dying body.

At one point during the six months Ernie spent in the hospital there seemed a crest of improvement. Ignoring the fact of his circumstance and successfully relying on those around him to ignore it too, Ernie insisted on being transported home to his own bed. In the first three days he sat up clothed, used the children's old potty, listened to the radio, rested in the front room big chair. By the end of the first week he spoke glibly of his recovery, the wavering, high-pitched tone of his voice denying his words with every syllable. They moved him out to Elizabeth's house to make it easier for her to take care of him. Soon after, he fell trying to get to the potty. Elizabeth heard the crash and screamed. Until Elaine came home four hours later

Elizabeth had to sit on the floor by him because he would not release his bone-cold grip on her arm long enough for her to get to the telephone. In the ensuing weeks he did not move from the bed.

And now, the yellow: skin, eyes, finger nails, hair. His breath, in short wheezes, thick with a rusty, coppery smell and his eyes never completely closed, even when he slept. Elaine could always see his eye ball half under the fluttering lid. At times she watched the artery on the side of his neck swelling and deflating with alarming regularity. His heart pumped blood through the thinning body with an efficiency that seemed cruel to her. Up it swelled like an almost burst balloon; down plop flat, the same terrifying pulse rippling through to his wrist. And on he lived, day by day, beat by beat. His skin pulled back toward his ears and his skull narrowed. Elizabeth shaved his face faithfully, watching as the hollow in his jaw slowly became a shadow. The hair in his nose seemed longer than ever before. And Elizabeth changed the sheets every morning to defend him against the muted disgust of those who knew about the incessant sewage from broken-down systems.

Such ugly pictures fled through Elaine's mind during her infrequent and laboured visits to the bedroom. She looked on dumbly as Clyde Jarry slipped his needles into the dried skimpy skin and muscle. She came in one morning and found the intravenous attachment dangling like a pendulum at the end of the cord descending from the bottle above the bed. Ernie had pulled it out and his gaunt arm hung helplessly down beside the bed. She saw where the removed adhesive tape had raised a rectangular ridge around the bruised hole where the needle had been.

"There's no place for it to go any more," he mumbled, depressing the syringe slowly.

Ernie Giffen made few efforts to move his own body, although his lips opened and closed regularly with involuntary, almost inaudible clicking sounds. Two yellow-black eyes looked out.

The doctor asked the women to leave and he pulled back the covers to examine the man's abdomen and thigh, the blue-black welts and lumps standing out like scaldings, Ernie's penis a spent worm among them. Jarry traced the growths, made note of them, replaced the blankets. Ernie felt no pain in his prolonged stupour. Step-mother and daughter came back in; they knew how long it took and did not need to be summoned.

"Maybe you could listen," Elizabeth said.

"Eh?"

The doctor looked up at her kindly. She had accepted the slow strangulation, his mummy-like existence day after day on the bed. In the morning there was hope for a facial gesture or a word; by night there was only muted and pained resignation. She thought she could hear a word in the clicks of his lips. Jarry understood quickly and bent his ear close to Ernie's mouth. One minute, another.

"I believe he's asking for Ford, Elizabeth."

3

"Who was that, Ford?" Valerie asked.

*Ford, your father died this morning . . .
at 2:45*

. . . so that when Ford met the words: who was that, Ford? the words, and when they ripped into his ears, vibrating for a few seconds in some dark, vestibular place; when his brain, his head, when he heard, understood, the concise, demanding sounds: who was that, Ford? and when they settled in, around, Jarry's *Ford, your father died* . . . he merely stared back at Valerie, listening to her question repeating itself. He walked toward her, his eyes fogging, he felt, the inertia descending, the words,

"He's dead, I . . . "

. . . he had started with words, three words and I, and three more from those three and I -- three times three times three, a billion combinations sprang at him from a mirror behind her, from the window beside the mirror, from the grey-white, dry-cracked paint on the window sill, from her wide open eyes, from the uncovered light bulb, from the leaning walls, the heaving floor, the hard, heavy, fixed ceiling . . .

"Who's dead? Ford, what's happened?"

. . . Valerie's voice -- rising, floating slowly to the ceiling to join the naked light bulb, bouncing quickly to the floor, hitting the wall, the window, and with each reverberation the words: *who's dead, who's dead, who's dead* in his head, his head, *dead, dead* . . .

*ring around the rosie
pockets full of posie
husha, husha
they all fall down-n-n*

Make a ring around the rosie: the guy with the red, oily sores, pustules all over his body -- stuff his pockets full of flowers and stifle the stink -- everybody's gonna fall down -- *husha, husha*

"Ford! Answer me! Who's dead? What's the matter with you?"

"My father," he whispered. "There isn't anything you should think.

He sat still, not looking at her. He fell back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. She leaned over him for a moment but began to draw back, frightened as always by his distance, by the way he would look out at her, read her gestures, her face, her mannerisms, the way he saw so many messages from her body that betrayed the words, the way he was always so close to tears and so close to hysterical laughter from moment to moment. It frightened her and she stood up. She did not want the tears or the cries or the fits. She wanted to comfort him but he made the impulse impossible and after hesitating, she quickly busied herself again with getting ready to go to work. She knew Ford wouldn't terrorize her with his eyes and hands, mysterious and uncomfortable. She'd just get out. He would let her go.

"Valerie, it was from Colme. My father died this morning. It's too fast, the fact is too fast . . . "

. . . shaking his head, sitting up on the edge of the bed, looking at her, her breasts big and round in her blouse, her hair uncombed, perplexed on her head. She leaned over him again. He reached his arms around her buttocks and pulled her down toward him. She pushed him away, lost her balance, tumbled awkwardly onto the bed. She stood up immediately, opened a drawer -- comb, comb, comb -- He turned to plead with her, to stop her from moving, to make her want to hold him

a moment without explanations, without expectations, without the equilibrium first.

She walked out of the room desperately confused, yielding before the consuming impulse to run away from having to comfort him, from having to see him break down, from having to be so unsure about how he would act. The fact of his father's death wouldn't stick with her. To her Ernie Giffen was remote, only verbally real. She would soon be late for the trolley car. Weaver was still waiting in the kitchen.

"Ready?" he asked, and added, "What's the matter?"

"I don't know; he says his father's dead." She looked directly at Weaver as she spoke. Suddenly she ran back to the bedroom. Ford was sitting on the bed, his head in his hands.

"Just now?" Weaver said behind her.

"Yes," she answered, putting on her light jacket quickly, walking over to Ford who was immobile on the bed.

"Maybe you'd better stay," Weaver replied, standing nervously beside the door. He was frozen there in a standing spring: curious enough to wait out the crisis, coward enough to hold the door partly open; very afraid of what was happening between Valerie and Ford.

Then he and Valerie were both gone: the hurried but restrained closing of the door, footsteps along the hall and on the stairs going down to the street. Like the uncovered bulb on Ford's retina, an afterglow of their movement, vaguely, but real in the room. Ford went after them, stopping at the door where he saw Mrs. Higgins' cat. It looked up at him blankly and he realized that he was alone with his message from Colme.

He watched the bulb, a little sun in smoked glass. When he looked at the wall it was there alone on the flat white. He was in the room without Valerie, without sound, without smell. He touched the back of his front teeth with the tip of his tongue. On the ceiling of the room, rust-edged water stains, one tributary meandering across the ceiling seeking its own level, falling in a plastery waterfall along the window wall to the linoleum.

In the kitchen he turned on the tap. The water splattered about the sink, some drops, tiny gentle missiles, hitting his face. They made him think of the very moment. The feel of water on his face. The cold, hard enamel of the sink on his hands. His knees against the cupboard door below. The sensations sprawled over him.

Perception -- the word came to mind.

He thought about the acute perception. What is my habit, he asked himself: floating? to let any sensation, any thought, any word, fill me? Study the surface minutely, he commanded himself. That's what I said I'd do. The habit of minute study of the moments, a surface-study habit.

He was aware in flashes, in shafts of clarity, of what he had been thinking standing there not believing what he recalled. For when the process seemed to clog, when it stopped, he knew he didn't give a damn. Because he couldn't reason it out, couldn't get the process stuck to the words. Sometimes, like a rubber membrane stretching all over things, perceiving them by sucking them in: can't stretch all the way all the time, but doing a fine job getting at the moment.

His hands, wet, pressed firmly against his face. He remembered the phone call and walked to the bedroom to search for it. Came back to the kitchen table and again his eyes caught the elm. The entire sequence returned.

He saw it in this order: beginning-middle-end; end ended before each new beginning. Again he wanted to stand up, to push away the oppression which sprawled over him like an inebriated, obese bitch, but with the elm, the familiar elm, a calm and from the calm arose directives. It was Jarry who had called, Jarry who had seen Katherine's father to the grave, who had seen Katherine to the grave, who would now see Ernie to the grave, mothers-fathers-sons all.

He would call Elaine to gather details, to force himself to act, to direct himself. Like a bullet, he thought; like a bullet out of a gun. There are no straight lines in the sky, he mused -- gathering details to make movement.

He pictured Elaine bending over his father, their father, dying for two years: she was looking into the old man's boney face, one of his eyes fluttering a little, the artery in his neck rising and falling nervously. Where are those eyes now, he wanted to know. Where did they go? I remember them, he thought; I remember them raging brown if directly defied, or smiling sometimes, brown-black and the nose and the mouth and the cheeks that worked together to make magic faces for fairy tales, to scold, to swear, to talk gently, to whistle sometimes, to talk and talk, always boasting of world-wisdom, always expounding about the know-how it took to live without selling out to them -- the money-lenders, the mortgage-givers, the confident accountants. Ford felt as though

he were shaking off an embarrassing act, a stupid act. Again, Elaine bending over their father: she was half-aware, he assumed, half-aware of the process ending, two years ending, a lifetime ending, thinking and maybe saying death words, death-bed words.

"But mother, it's like a leaf falling from a tree. It dies so that other leaves may grow again."

"It's no leaf! It's your father!"

He saw her bending over the bed, bending over the shrunken yellow man in a white diaper: the white contrasting strangely with the yellow hair, the yellow eye balls, the yellow skin, the yellow.

And then a new calm came to Ford. With the calm, his sister. He beckoned her gently to him and holding her in his hand he wiped her all over the towel hanging beside the white sink. He was struggling to articulate it all in words, to talk away the turbulence, to freeze the instant, to freeze it all in words so that he could see it steadily and clearly.

He turned off the tap and the water-roar faded. A silence before the new and distant street sounds he knew would come. He began to imagine Jarry's phone call as a fiction and his mind filled with his father. His father, moving in his Chrysler cars, moving in Colme, in Clinton, in Goderich, in Owen Sound, in London. He pictured his father's strong body in Molloy's *Five and Dime* and in *Hing's Restaurant*. Everywhere in Colme, his father, only time separating the body from where it was groomed in Trask's barber shop, thin, thin membranes fogging out the ghosts, ghosts of Trask with his straight edge razor, ghosts of his father in the town hall courtroom, humble and stupid like a cornered

braggart, buying another direct sales vendor's permit; ghosts of his father arched, belly sagging, back and shoulders wet and hot, over his women. Ghosts of his father waiting for Katherine to permit a divorce, ghosts of his father getting weaker as the traces became welts on his belly and started to kill him. Only time. Can I ever start to see this thing whole, Ford thought.

He walked out of the kitchen, dirt and crumbs under his bare feet like sandpaper. The hall was dark.

He didn't see the ghosts in the Toronto room. My father has never been here, he thought as he dialed. He heard the operator struggling with numbers and names and operator's route signals. He let his memories of the people in Colme, his father in Colme, his time in Colme, mingle with the operator's busy-work.

"Ghosts," he mumbled,
and Elaine answered,

"Hello?"

Ford reached to touch the hair brush on the dresser. His fingers followed the smooth curve of the handle to the flatter, wider base and the bristles. He looked at the bristles, white, standing in little packets of three or four, growing out of one little hole.

"Hello," he answered.

"Yes, who is this?"

"Is that you Elaine?"

"Who is this?"

"Ford."

"Oh my God. Ford! Where are you? Are you here?"

"Toronto."

"Ford, the funeral. It's on Saturday. At two-thirty, Ford," she said slowly.

"At *Madill's*?"

"Yes . . . He wanted you. He cried for you at the end."

Ford pushed his index finger against the tiny packet of bristles. Where it met little plastic shoot, the skin became white, like the bristles, an impure white. He pressed harder: the plastic bristle was like a knife point and he laughed slightly.

"Can you come today?" Elaine asked.

"I don't know."

"I can't do it alone, Ford. Not alone. The son should be here. Ford, are you coming? I'd better get off or it'll cost you too much money."

He relaxed the pressure on the bristle, slid his fingers around the squared edge of the dresser and down to the ornamental drawer handle. He stared at its sloping and symmetrical curve, thought about the slope of the phone receiver in his hand, thought about the tiny speaker against his ear and about the little holes in the black plastic, about Elaine and her voice.

"You can get a bus from Toronto today?"

"Elaine, I . . ."

He breathed heavily into the mouthpiece. Continued,

"I'll come to it, I'll get there. Was he awake?"

"Awake? No; I mean, I don't know. I don't know. He just had his eyes open, frowning. He *frowned* as he was dying, like he was disappoint-

ed, like everything was a big disappointment. At the end. I can't do it alone, Ford. You'll have to come today. Elizabeth is useless. She won't even go to the River Road house to get dad's suit."

"Why'd you let Jarry call? Why didn't you call to tell me?"

He detected a swell of crying beginning in her, urgent like a burp caught in the throat. He let his hand fall away from the drawer handle to the side of the bed.

"I'll get there," he began, and added,

"He hated us; the possibilities when you're young. He waited until he had time to see us, to feel us, and then it was too late."

"I don't know what he felt. Please, not now. I better hang up now; it's costing too much. The son should be here. I didn't think you'd come, like last time."

He suspended the receiver by two fingers against his ear.

"I'll come when I can."

Then he set it in its cradle and sat for what seemed a long while.

In the living room, a front room, on the horizontal door he used as a desk, there were pencils, a typewriter, books on boards supported by bricks. Pages of his unfinished thesis were scattered over the desk and on top of the books. He picked up a few sheets randomly. There were typing errors and penciled-in revisions like smudges on the page:

. . . the leader of the delegation arranged for the treaty to be signed by the chief of the 440-member band. The treaty date, April 26, 1825, marks the final and most obvious steamrolling of the Chippewaen culture. Chief Wawanosh (he who sails well on water) made his mark and by the terms of the treaty accepted that the Indians would renounce all title in consideration of 1,100 pounds per annum "as long as the grass grows or water

runs". Records compiled by W.W. Robarts in 1928 show that payments ceased on a formal basis May 1st., 1868. Cumulatively the payments in arrears owed to the Chippewa Band as of Canada's Centennial with interest calculated at 1825 rates (source: DBS, National Archives), exceed one-half million pounds at their 1825 value which today amounts to over three-quarters million . . .

He dropped the sheet and put a blank one into his typewriter. He typed,

Valerie, gone home by bus to Colme for the funeral.

He whispered the words to himself and typed again,

home

The word, home, a catalyst, started the flow, the flashbacks: they exploded and multiplied. Home, he thought; gone home.

back in a few days

he typed; and whispered aloud and typed: *Valerke*. Impulsively he pulled the paper away from the typewriter so that the roller clacked like a sprung clock would up too far. He looked around the desk top for more paper and saw only books.

His hands worked through the filing folders, the filled pages. He pushed them aside and then suddenly stopped his rummaging. In the bedroom he decided he would tell her face to face and she would understand that he must go to Colme again. He would not let the print or the paper do it for him, or the words: not at this time.

5

Ford stopped in the hall to check the mailbox and found a parcel there for him -- likely the book, he thought. He put it under his arm unopened. Twice he felt for the coins and paper money in his pocket: once when he walked along the hall toward the steps, once as he stepped onto the pavement in front of the building.

A streetcar's steel wheels were heavy as they rolled on steel tracks and the whine, expected sound, of the invisible armature, pulling people from a place to a place, stronger than the weight of those bodies and the machine, the clever mechanical advantage. He stepped up into the car. His token rattled into the long, rectangular box. He watched it, a silver circle, tumbling into the tiny anti-theft labyrinth. He walked to the back of the car and stood with one hand over his head holding on to a worn brass bar, the other hand holding his parcel. A black sweater on the woman beneath him: she had dry, brown hair and was looking out the window. Ford looked out the window too. His body lurched and leaned with the car's movement, the facades of small Italian grocery stores run by former farmers and their sons zipping in front of him. *UNICO. UNICO.* In white letters on red background, etched images. He could picture a scene for a second or two at will. They were like Futurist paintings: arms moving, fat bulkily dressed women with black hair fresh from stations at St. Helen's carrying great coloured cloth grocery sacks and always some child negotiating around the parent, the child leaning into the run, unaware of the ritual which brought him to that street market, unaware of the ritual of the bargaining, of the exchange of ugly sea creatures for money, of the exchange of slurred

words and guarded respectabilities and proprieties.

A car blocked the picture, flat, red, shining surfaces leaping along the hood and up the windowshield farther back, moving faster than the streetcar, faster but silent and smooth on the cobblestone and pavement below. And gone.

The woman in the black sweater stood and occupied his entire perspective, her heavy sweater close to his face, smelling old. She moved even closer to him, dry wrinkled skin, lines at her lips, little black hairs under her nose. She wasn't Italian, Ford was thinking. She moved forward, so much flesh hanging under her sweater. The material of her dress pressed tightly around the skin of her thick, reddened arms; the skin holding in the fat and vessels carious like the sheath of a rotting sausage. He saw and heard a great chest heaving unconsciously, bringing air into the body. Ford imagined her young and slim, and considered air passing uncorrupted in and out of her lungs. Mountains of food shovelled into an enormous funnel bulging at the arms, burning up inside. In time, this, he thought. She pushed through the people, down the step and out to the island. And gone.

Again the whine of the hidden electric motors. A great force pulling a hall of people, people moving from a place to a place, travelling through the Annex on affairs. And a long pole above them all, above the ceiling, connecting the moving hall to thin, sagging lines in turn connected to huge city grids of master electricians and engineers whose skills knit the city together like a giant cloak. He looked down the aisle and abandoned his abstractions to concentrate on many backs of heads.

"Spadina!" the driver called out.

A well-done skull, he observed, its hairs lined up and smoothed into rounded curves. He was looking at a woman sitting near the window toward the back of the bus. Then another head, an old one, shiny skin. The car stopped.

Ford moved mechanically into the coats and arms and shoulders around him. Their clothing pressed against him. Not once did they see his eyes. Always down or away or, if at all, to his eyes only for an instant, as if by chance. The door folded itself open.

On the island he stood a moment to decide when to move across the single lane to the sidewalk. The cars waited impatiently. He moved abruptly and as he did so the streetcar pulled away behind him: again the whine, again the moving rooms of people and the grind of steel on steel, heavy sound, out of place it seemed, in a time of rubber wheels. When he reached the sidewalk an old man came up.

"You wanna paper mister?"

The old vendor was turning a wet cigarette around in his lips, black bristles of beard sticking out randomly from his jawbone. Ford handed him a dime and instantly the paper hawker turned away, handing Ford a paper. Ford imagined him in private circumstances: in forgotten fights, a night's tally in closeby bars; in hurried, disappointed love stolen from decrepit beer broads in rooms heaped and huddled nearby. Any morning, any month, old men on city corners shouting headlines, Ford knew, old men selling their armloads of papers to people stepping from streetcars and store doors. Ford noticed the old man's thick, brown-framed glasses, and watched as he brought one of his papers close

to his face and struggled to read the headlines, yelling enthusiastically a few seconds later: "Cosmonauts killed! Cosmonauts killed!", and darting about his territory asking men in double-knit suits, asking men in dark-blue coats, too dark for a warm, already humid summer morning,

"Wanna paper mister? *Star* mister?"

Abstractions buzzed in his head as Ford walked -- the gargantuan system of news and print churning, churning, he was thinking, churning invisibly in tall nearby buildings, incessantly, wires passing through walls into machines bringing words and pictures from other places, to the makers of the news and print; and they gave *their* wares to old men to sell. Ford looked in at a *Kresge's* window display of camping equipment and instantly forgot about newspapers and their humming omnipresence.

A woman in white dress stretched to place a sign: *Special--.49* in front of a tin canteen with a mesh-green cover. She stood on a small stool behind the window bay. Ford followed the line of her arm, at a glance, to where the line curved into a layer of dark, brown hair. She was leaning to the left and behind her head and shoulders a backdrop of blue crepe. Suddenly she saw Ford, and ignored him. Again she stretched. Then she looked into his face and again rapidly looked away. Finally she stepped down and disappeared somewhere behind the cars, crepe, mannequins, tents, lanterns, axes, pack sacks, back packs, knap sacks, Coleman tent heaters, pocket knives, nylon ropes (red,white,yellow), barbecue stands, habatchies, portable grills, fishing rods, reels, monofilament line in spools, sun hats, fishing lures, and one upturned green fibre-glass canoe with a striped yellow and red paddle. Ford looked for her beyond the signs and counters where people were holding shirts,

dressess, socks, in their hands. A young woman, a mother, he thought, held a towel up to a fluorescent tube light above her head. Another woman in white was folding men's pants, and putting them in orderly piles on a table: *Men's Pants/Special Clearance/2 for 7.95* .

Ford walked on. A corner of people had stopped for a light change. His eyes found an opening through them to the street. Colours moved across that opening, cars green, blue, brown, red; and wheels moving noiselessly, sudden round black with silver centres beneath flat panels of colour. Simultaneously, a red, a green, and movement between the colours of those separate cars, a montage for his eyes, eyes which turned from that tableau to other movement: a man walking quickly into the street, impatient with the red light and the red words *DO NOT WALK*; a light changing frequency; an enormous diesel truck juggling and jerking to a stop; men in suits moving behind plate glass windows in stores across the street, the diesel truck hissing and groaning, its engine anxious to expend energy, its driver's arms moving back and forth pulling at invisible levers and controlling monstrous black wheels. Wheels a few feet from moving little feet and across the intersection a teenage boy on his bicycle standing on the pedals coasting over the pavement as over glass or polished ice, moving in front of people stopped a step above, people whose heads bobbed, people whose heads looked down as they stepped from curb to pavement, people who stared straight ahead, people busy with affairs, appointments, passing inches from Ford's face in the street . . . And Ford, watching the sway of a woman's hips in front of him, imagining the lines of her buttocks, deciphering the limits of her bumcheeks, the narrowness of her waist: passed all of these like an

indiscriminate camera.

A car horn suddenly, and then rubber tires like endless running-shoe soles on hardwood floors, sticky rolling sounds and sudden squeaks. And from motors, the crescendo of accelerating pistons, muffled shots from exhaust pipes; but among the spiral, the whirl of sounds, no single voices, no voices. Then nearby a short mother scolding a trotting red-haired boy, a teenager in blue jeans and bright pink shirt dancing around his tittering girl friend, laughing like a harlequin before a sidewalk court. A merchant's loudspeaker sending CHUM-tones to the sidewalk, to passing people's ears:

*. . . tops in pops for the teens in town
dumble dandy candy man record time . . .
itsa right time in the sun shine yor ol'
bosom buddy Cousin Clive Manner: C.M. in
the a.m. at the big eight-o, 10:10 for
mother hen . . .*

sounds whirling and images whirling, thick and omnipresent as bus fumes and horns. Ford moved more and more quickly along the sidewalk, but from the spate of noise and pictures words to him,

"Hey Ford, what's the big rush?"

and Clare Colby, tall, ever-smiling, ever-dancing, jumped up beside him.

6

"Hello Col'," Ford said, not slowing down. Clare Colby kept up and put his long, strong arm around Ford's shoulder. Ford walked more slowly, uncomfortably. Colby was taller and moved in loping, awkward strides, swinging his hips, feet close together, like a television Indian.

Colby delighted in alarming conventional people. He had lost his job at the Village patio cafe called the *Minah Bird* because of one private exhibition. A fat lady and her paunchy, passive man, weekend Village visitors, had just been served their hot hamburg specials.

"Oh look at that one; she's advertising all she has," Mrs. Fats had sneered.

"I wonder where her parents live," her husband replied.

"Martin! Look at that boy! He's walking around aroused!"

"Don't be ridiculous; it's just the style today."

Colby was listening to them chattering about passers-by and he instantly detested Mrs. Fats, as he called her later. So that when the busboy came to pick up plates from a nearby table Colby kissed and fondled him in one dramatic swoop.

"They shouldn't have got angry about a little bit of rough trade," Colby had snickered, drinking what was left of Mrs. Fats' milkshake and nibbling on Martin's warm burger.

But the busboy was seriously upset.

"What did you expect?" Ford admonished him later that day; "you want everybody to act the way the gays at the *St. Charles* do?" And Colby, indifferent, danced off into the kitchen of Ford's apartment.

"That over-rated dishwasher's a phoney fag," Colby countered.

"They'd de-ball him at the *St. Charles*. I should have kissed Papa Fats too, right on the butt. Woulda made it worth it," Colby added in the same unreserved tone he used now to ask Ford,

"So what's happening?"

"Have to go home for a few days."

Colby tapped a folded *Ramparts* against his thigh; there was some secret rhythm in his eyes. Ford watched the moving magazine, heard its tap-tap, ta-ta-tap-tap.

"So what's in Colme you gotta take off so fast? Thought you hated that hole?"

Ford looked down, watched the quick, snapping movements of the magazine, felt himself slowing down, slowing. Stopping. Finally leaning against a plate glass window. Colby's questions articulating themselves independently of the large head fastened loosely on top of the tall, skinny body.

"You stoned Giffen?"

"No."

Ford glanced up at his old friend's face. Colby's entire body moving to some primeval and perpetual bass rhythm. Annoying to Ford: the grey-black stains on the inside and edges of Colby's shirt. And white, ashy skin disappearing under it. Colby's face, an ivory pallor, always in motion -- Atlantis rings around his pupils, raised brows, corrugated forehead, palpitating jaw; lips thick and red, chewing something. Persistent red acne scratches and recent infections peering like prisoners through bleak, reddish-brown beard. A lump of

adhesive tape weighing heavily on one side of the frame of his glasses, one arm of which moved limply in time with the unending dance. Hair hanging shiny and wet-looking against his ears.

When he walked Colby moved his head slightly from side to side. When he was standing in one place the direction of movement changed to vertical -- and always in tempo with his shoulders and torso. He stood a half-foot taller than Ford.

"So, you got a minute?" Colby asked again, looking around, his high-pitched voice warning Ford.

"You need money Col'?"

Clare swayed a bit, looked off down the sidewalk. Aware that he was interrupting Ford, intimidating him, pressing him. He returned his eyes to Ford's and smiled fawningly:

"Spare a sawbuck? I'm flat."

"You been broke long?" Ford asked, considering his old friend furtively.

"No longer than usual."

"Bread and water?"

"Are you kidding?"

and both men exchanged smiles, recalling for an instant, Wednesday late morning raids on the fascinating disorder of Kensington Market. Colby had shown Ford how.

"You lousy guys; you think I'm made from money? Uhn? You think I can give this stuff away, uhn?"

"Look you goddam Jew, you think I don't know this stuff's crawling with maggots? I'd go on bread and water first. You got any rancid eggs

you don't want?"

So went the first few lines of their standard barter, as Colby called it. Klem Fischer enjoyed the battle. He would inveigle suburban customers into buying substandard meat parts, laughing with them as they delighted in real choices, accustomed as they were to the plastic-wrapped monotony of the supermarkets. They were no challenge, the suburban buyers. Ford liked haggling endlessly with Fischer for stale chicken parts.

Freshly butchered beef that might have fallen on the pavement and now hung like imported fruit under sloppy canvas covers was hard to barter for. Exotic fish with big grey eyes and wrinkled snouts disgusted Ford. Lentils, carrots, potatoes in mountains, squash in piles, turnip in mounds, cucumbers in careful rows: all displayed in hurried heaps on top of ancient wood street stalls which spilled boldly out onto the sidealks of Kensington and Baldwin Streets. Klem Fischer's apron was always red with chicken and turkey blood -- little feathers stuck there like fuzz on flypaper.

"Comeon, comeon. No freeloading this morning, eh? Give me a break and pay the ten cents a pound; you guys afford beer, you can afford ten cents a pound. Get your clammy meathooks off that chicken."

The trick was to get hold of the chicken's neck if it was whole, or to drop a breast or a wing on the sidewalk during the harangue over price. Sometimes Klem and other vendors would pass over their counters for almost nothing old turkey livers, duck guts, pork hearts, and other obscure anatomical delicacies. Sometimes a fast hand and a busy vendor made for clean pickings. But Colby and Ford never stole from Klem Fis-

cher.

"Christ Giffen; spot me a fin at least. Without the hassle, man; without the one-two-three-let's-see shit. I don't hit you, hardly ever. Fuck, I need the cash."

"What're you financing?"

"Standard, baby, standard. I gotta get a couple of yards together by tonight. Right? You want in? B.M.'s got a deal doing."

Ford hadn't thought of the Balloonman for many months. The first impressions and images he had had of the street dealer now crowded back into his mind: B.M., Italian-looking, peddling by slowly and steadily, smiling like a sad clown, helium-filled balloons, red orange yellow green blue purple white black brown grey pink, riding above the handlebar of his bicycle cart, their colours dancing even on overcast days. And in the wood and glass case at the front of the bicycle, candy apples, popcorn, suckers, licorice, boodle bags. Colby had explained that on certain days B.M. rode his cart with its full load down to the City Hall square, Union Station, the Bay-Dundas terminal, the office blocks below College Street. On his way back at night, Colby said, B.M. would ring the little silver bell on his handlebar and kids would congregate.

"He's a dealer," Colby declared quietly to Ford when the Balloonman peddled by as they were ambling along Yorkville Road.

"He looks like a wop peddler."

"He's up the ladder a ways; but he's only big to the street pushers."

"Who's he work for?"

"The bitch goddess."

"Eh?"

"In his business nobody works for anybody. It's deal time all the time. B.M.'s casual about it; knows enough to keep small and keep everybody else guessing. He deals Dundas and College; neat system."

"You mean . . ."

"You ask too many fucking questions," Colby had said suddenly as they turned into a cafe.

Then, as now, Ford experienced a consuming guilt, guilt because he had prodded his friend with questions; and now, guilt because he remembered an unspoken, somehow momentarily forgotten commitment. Not a debt, but an allegiance; a brotherhood without noise.

"Clare, let me stay tonight, I can't stay at home alone. Cuttle's not here. I don't know where else to go."

"But man, I got . . ."

and two years earlier Ford had peered through Colby's door into the dark, the room pungent with cannabis and incense; the bear rug pathetically on linoleum, a clear-faced teenage boy squatting near bright orange-coloured crates, beer bottles piled carefully one on top of the other against the wall: seen straight on they looked like discs. A wine bottle stuck out from the bear's jaws like a shiny esophagus. Colby hadn't turned him away; instead he had kissed his fag goodnight. And now, remembering, remembering how Colby had sent the boy away, Ford felt guilty: they had talked until dawn. Colby had understood without questions, without demands and kept Ford with him for almost a week, listening to the nightmares about the river and Katherine. He listened without expectations, and let Ford shake off the grief.

"So spot me a fin, then, goddamit."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry Col'. I don't even know how much I have on me. Maybe I'll get some money from Valerie before I leave."

"Hitch-hike."

"I might. But I think I can give you ten."

"What's with this Valerie? She still letting you mark her in for bed and board?"

"Let's go to *Dingle's*. I'll call Valerie from there. How much do you really need?"

"Twenty-five up. Seventy-five would be better, or maybe a yard. A yard and you're in on the deal. B.M. wants yard lots; he won't bargain with anybody, the bastard."

"Sure sale?"

"You come in and you'll get the money back in three days with fifty on top."

"I don't think she's got that much to loan though; not even for three days."

Colby grinned.

"You living with her right now?" he asked.

"More or less."

Ford started walking again. His attention darted back and forth between Colby's high-pitched voice and his own thoughts. He was trying to organize his movements, his directions. *The son should be here*, he was thinking; bastard probably died with a hard-on.

Colby put his arm around Ford's shoulder again as they walked toward the obscure pub on D'Arcy Street. Ford felt wrong about going to Colme, felt hot and uncomfortable walking so close to Colby who droned

on about his deal. Ford felt shuffled along unwillingly -- toward dark *Dingle's* pub, toward humid Colme. He wished he hadn't called Elaine.

"Man, you read *Cybernetic Serendipity*?"

Ford shook his head, distracted by the question, anxious with his own thoughts.

"Jeez, that broad knows it; she's zero-slam-pow, right on top of that whole cybernetic trip."

Colby gleamed but his dancing lope stopped in the next instant. He had slammed accidentally into a stout, middle-aged man in tie and jacket.

"Wha -- God, watch . . . " the stranger spluttered.

Colby's grin vanished. He caught his balance, shouted,

"What's *God* got to do with it you stupid mother-horse?"

Colby pointed his middle finger stiffly to the sky, palm at right angles to his wrist. And then the stranger disappeared into the people and movement on the sidewalk.

Ford watched indifferently. They walked on. Ford was now careful to keep laterally a foot or more away from Colby. As he talked on, though, Colby's arms flew in all directions. He bent his shoulders and head around in front of Ford to make a point. Twirled about on the sidewalk in an anticipatory victory dance. Finally they turned into *Dingle's*.

"What a mother bitch your broad is. She's gonna rob your body, man; gonna snip your jewels."

Colby giggled like an adolescent female, the titter muffled by his tight-lipped grin.

They sat opposite each other in one of the booths. Ford set his unopened parcel on the table. *Dingle's* was like a shoe box: longer

than wide, entirely functional. Papa Dingle had built the little stage himself. Mamma Dingle accepted and encouraged the noon-hour strip shows. Tens of dozens of office men would file through, especially on Fridays, for eye and bellyfulls. All they could eat and glean for 1.95 . It meant that Papa had to wear a suit now. Farther into the room chairs were upside down on table tops. Two men, one of them Papa, were bent over a table talking quickly and angrily about numbers and quantities.

"Draught up?" Ford asked Mamma Dingle. She ambled leisurely to their booth, conserving her energy for a noon-hour onslaught of comers who were willing to spend a few hours of quiet snifters at *Dingle's*, anticipating more affluent noon-hour engagements later on in their careers -- perhaps at the *York Club* on St. George at Bloor where Colby once worked; or at the *Friar's* for real skyrocket nouveau-riche salaried men.

"Four?" Mamma asked quickly.

"Six," Colby answered. He slapped Ford's hand lightly and added, grinning into Mamma Dingle's face,

"You guys going to stop building around here? You're ruining one of our favourite haunts; right Ford?"

Ford nodded indifferently.

"On the way up boys," she boasted, wiping off the table. "Never would have got our license weren't for Oscar. Why, he's living over in Rosedale. He's got a good address now."

"Figure you'll buy Casa Loma with the profits Mamma?" Colby chuckled.

She was so resolute, so caught up in her plans.

"Ha, Clare Colby; you keep drinking my beer and watch our boys. City helps them knows how to help themselves. I think the salad's ready by now. Why you come so early? You're too early for any of the 'bord."

"S'okay; just business talk this morning Mamma. All we want's beer."

"Who's Oscar?" Ford asked after the woman left.

"Oscar Asshole. Alderman, ward four. Used to deal Dundas and College with B.M. Made a big score and ended up buying some parking lots on Dupont. Balled the Minister of Education's oldest boy. He's never looked back, Oscar Scagliones, Italian Polack. Got big. Gotta get protection when you get big; so he went to City Hall. There it is. Now he's down at Viljo Rewell's hive making better deals. B.M. figures Oscar'll get real ambitious pretty soon."

"What's he doing the Dingles favours for?"

"Ego. He used to tab in here. Mamma had confidence in him, right? The old man used to complain, but she stuck up for her boy; so he gets her the big license just to show the old man up. Mamma turns around and gets all the chinks on Elizabeth Street to dip into their used peanut oil jars and finance the big renovation. Presto, Mamma and Papa are into dough."

Ford listened impatiently, the sentences almost in print, with commas, question marks, declarations, phrases. Colby's jocular manner irritated him, Colby coming across like an obsequious, high-pressure freeloader. Ford hated that pose; remembered a gentler Colby, the Colby of the days and nights after Katherine's death, when he had

watched and waited paternally for Ford to slow, to get out from under the pressure.

Colby sensed Ford's impatience. Restrained, he grinned. Ford, pressed now by the grin, sat motionless as his friend continued to blunder boorishly into his day. Ford sat under the weight of his old dependence on Clare. He played with his parcel, turning it over and back again on the table top.

"So you read this broad?" Colby asked as the first clutch of office men filed past the booth, every one of them with one hand in a pants' pocket and the other akimbo, mouths chattering.

"No, haven't."

"Jeez, Ford; she's right about all of it. Fact, it was Cuttle who told me about her."

Ford nodded but he felt distant and indifferent yet. He began thinking about Cuttle, the apex of their triangle: Cuttle-Colby-Ford; two years earlier. He didn't want to work at talking right now.

"You seen her lately?" Colby asked.

"No."

"I hear she's living in Regina with some lawyer."

"I haven't heard anything since I moved in with Valerie," Ford said.

"Ford, I'm telling you, that Valerie's a loser. Okay, so I've told you."

"What do you know about it?" Ford cried, immediately regretting his tone.

"You wanna defend her? Defend her. She's not supporting you for nothing you know. She figures it like an investment. She's stupid."

Colby fumbled in the side pocket of his frayed corduroy jacket and pulled out a crushed Player's pack. In a minute Colby's pallid jaw was veiled by smoke. He drew in with short, irritating puffs, and the smoke came out almost immediately through thin spherical nostrils. Ford detested the ritual. He wanted Colby to draw in gracefully, deeply, and to exhale unconsciously, strongly. Colby waved his *Ramparts* magazine at Ford again and the waitress came.

Colby's smile made creases in his scarred and scratched skin. Ford looked away, down at the floor and the worn tiles which patterned off by squares in every direction.

"She's not hurting me any," Ford said. "It's static now. She knows what it means."

Mamma Dingle set six draughts on the table. Colby pulled one in front of him as Ford paid her. Colby tried to blow a smoke ring. More men marched by in small groups. Ford handed Colby a ten dollar bill.

"Will it do?"

"Faster I get the cash, faster I get the deal."

"What is the deal?"

"Standard, standard. A few ounces; maybe a pound."

"Pound?"

"Ounces, pounds. Who cares? I got buyers. I need the cash, that's all."

"She won't lend me any I don't think."

Colby blew another smoke ring. He drew in heavily and as he

spoke the smoke rushed from his mouth and nose.

"So big deal; who needs her."

"You're dealing a lot again, aren't you?"

"Only when I'm low, really low, or desperate almost. B.M.'s always good for fast deals. He likes money and he can figure out more ways to get the stuff to me than any narc could dream up in a month. But since Don Jail he's more cautious with me, doesn't send me on runs. That's too bad; I was just getting used to seeing the country tourist class. You know he sent me to P.E.I. once? Jesus, Charlottetown's just a little shithole of a place. You can go from one end of that island to the other in a couple of hours. I'd get claustrophobia. Anyway, some fisherman brought in a shipment from St. Pierre-Miquelon. Now there's someplace I'd really like to get to. But you need a passport and it's getting tougher for me to get one."

"You're a fool. You're probably marked, and you'll break your ass when you try to move any volume. B.M. won't go bail and you know it. He'll dump you again."

"Man, man, I don't want the big cash. I don't want anything big. Me, I get up the energy now and then to make a hit. I want to drop some sauce in the bank to keep everything copasetic and pass my days pleasantly with no labour."

"You're no nihilist, Col'. If you think you are you're a bigger fool."

Colby began to leaf through his *Ramparts* magazine. Ford watched, fascinated for part of a minute, drumming his fingers on his parcel. Then Colby brought a tattered paperback out of his pocket: *The Myth of*

Sisyphus.

"He writes like a stupid bloody academic, but he writes from his guts. He's got an informed heart, not all cerebral.

What, in fact, is the absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal and to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, and of his revolt devoid of future, and of his mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime. That is his field, that is his action, which he shields from any judgment but his own. A greater life cannot mean for him another life.

I don't need the rules. You don't loan me the money, I get it somewhere else and I don't get it somewhere else I stay broke a few days or months or years more. I got my integrity anyway."

"There are other ways to get fast cash," Ford said playing with the parcel.

"Yeah, we both know that," Colby replied.

"Maybe you'd be smarter this time."

"Forget it. I'll make a deal. Maybe soon, maybe later. I buy what I buy and it goes up in smoke and everybody's happy but the double-knit city fathers. Old Oscar's not going to worry; B.M.'s not going to worry."

"Doesn't B.M. ever get nailed?"

"They're not interested in street shit any more. B.M.'s a turd. They watch him and hope he'll lead them higher. When I used to do his runs I was really doing runs for his suppliers. I did the joe-jobs,

B.M. got the cash. *He's* marked far more than me."

"You're playing around with big trouble," Ford said.

"It's only dabbling. I don't *feel* their goddam laws. The way they figure I should act is remote to me. Cops are grade ten dullards with clean shaves. Christ, they're privates and corporals and Jesuit prigs. They accept the way things are as absolute, the best of all possible worlds. Goddam it, they're *committed* to defending the way things are. No depth to them, no power, no insight. I court disaster you might think, and it titillates me. I've been bloody careful since Don Jail."

Ford relaxed and warmed; decided to make his call to Valerie while Colby continued to leaf through Camus.

"I'll be back. Maybe she'll spot me twenty; would that help?"

"Forget it," Colby said.

"I'll be back."

"Don Jail's a grim damn place."

"Yeah, it's a grim damn place."

"I'm careful. Make your call."

Colby took a long swallow of beer and set the glass down on the table lightly, turning it between his fingers. He continued reading, pensive, always sure, always in command.

Ford had envied that certitude and had even felt awed by it. He had taken Colby to a senior seminar at the University. Walking to the pay phone at the back of the pub Ford remembered Colby arguing with the professor about the relevance of medieval rhetoric to the homilies of Aelfric and Wulfstan.

"I insist," thundered the professor.

The other young people, competing for the attention and favour of the taskmaster, had been visibly embarrassed and were now threatened, almost panicking.

"I insist," mocked Colby; and for awkward strained moments the deadlock silenced the seminar. Ford watched it like a play: Colby was Edwin Mirvish, razzle-dazzle *Honest Ed* upturning the stuffies, clearing the air, fooling them all and not giving a damn. Getting back at the real point of seminar-teacher-student, Colby had told him.

Ford fumbled with the telephone directory, dialed the bus terminal, and then Valerie's office. A few minutes later he slipped back into the booth opposite Colby.

"Drink up, stuff's getting warm as piss," Colby said.

"Her phone's busy," Ford said.

He drank back -- one, two; he had long ago mastered the chug-a-lug. It was ice cold.

"*The Computer and the Arts*," Colby said eagerly.

"What?"

"Her book; Jasia Reichardt. *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts*. She figures it's all a fucking accident."

Colby kissed his beer glass and took a long swallow. Ford matched him and ordered six more.

"Maybe this Yankee broad should get her ass to Serendip, right? Ceylon's in the Commonwealth, though. Those Americans don't understand the Commonwealth. She'd need a goddam passport; maybe she's German.

She must be German."

Ford shook his head, burped, and pushed three empty glasses to the middle of the table.

"Don't know."

"You want to borrow this article?"

"I've got enough to read if I want to get this damn thesis done," Ford said waving his parcel.

"This Jasia Reichardt's good, bloody good," Colby continued. "Man, how you gonna argue it? Cybernetic volcanoes busting their lids all over the place; whole thing's gonna go on wires'n programmes. They're gonna plug us all in, one by one, and we ain't gonna move. Christ, some bitch's gone and counted all the stinking metaphors and similes in Pratt's poems. Can you believe? And we ain't gonna move. Let's see:

*For one carved instant as they flew
The language had no simile*

How the Christ is she going to categorize that one? She'd get a category goddamit. Legs gonna turn into poles with resistors, tapes and fortran. They're gonna knit us in knots, we're all gonna be plugged in like telephone poles."

Ford pushed the magazine back across the table. Mamma came with more beer.

"You don't take them seriously, they aren't serious," he suggested.

"Ah, but they are. They are. First Pratt, then the world," Colby cried.

"I'd better try to get through to Valerie again. See if I can get

some money from her."

"Forget it, I'll get money. When you coming back?"

"But I think I can get some from her."

"Don't want it."

There was an uneasy silence while Ford sipped on his beer and Colby scratched his bearded jaw.

"When you back?" Colby asked again.

"Monday; Tuesday maybe."

Ford emptied another glass.

"The deal'll get done."

"Good luck with it. Do you know the buyers? You got a family out there ready to deal or you doing it yourself?"

Colby grinned and nodded.

Ford slid out from the booth and stood above his friend. He took another swallow from the glass in his hand and picked up his parcel.

"Get your ass away from that broad, Ford. She'll drain you boy."

In a moment Ford was out on D'Arcy Street -- ten blocks to the Bay-Dundas terminal. A few minutes into the street and he realized that Colby had not asked again why he was going to Colme.

He fought the sun. In the street: horns, motors, and the daylight stream of the sidewalk.

Grange Park, McCaul, St. Patrick, Dundas, University Avenue: walking here Ford pictured the fields around Colme thick with corn and beans and then he imagined the same fields a thousand years into the future covered with buildings and paved streets. At University Avenue he looked north to Queen's Park and the Parliament Buildings -- the three arches. Cars moved in four lanes on either side of a wide median: trees, kiosks, tiered plant beds, benches, sidewalks. Neat, clean, grey. Sleek metal shapes, the cars up the Avenue, veering left to avoid the Queen's green and to avoid reddish-brown bricks of legislation occupying much of his perspective. And far to the north, Sir John A. MacDonald eyeing Sir Adam Beck: in stone stares. Close by, towering above the founder of Ontario Hydro's stone spillway, a winged angel of the world: monuments, while below the busy men and women of the city passed by. Sir John, tall and arrogant, everlastingly sober -- he made cabinets regularly in the old Queens' Hotel's Red Parlour and at one time boomed asunder George Brown in St. Lawrence Hall. That old Hall could call to attention a thousand voting souls. Now Sir John had the perspective of University Avenue to command, half a million busy voters and half a dozen recently planted trees in concrete boxes.

Alone on his perch, Ford thought to himself.

And his arch rival, Brown, relegated to other cities, other eyes.

Down the Avenue, toward him, veering back to the wide, black thoroughfare, shiny metal shapes in droves, shimmering as they straightened ranks. He watched the endless reserves of them spitting out from behind the Parliament buildings like shiny figurines on a merry-go-round, al-

ways bound to some central gear, swinging round to the Avenue and into view.

He crossed the Ave and heard a subway rumble blocks away bounding north and south with its late morning cargoes. He always imagined that the under-street-trains were grinding lost drunks under steel wheels, wheels black and imperfect as far as circles go because of bulging springs and bolts keeping the spinning spheres subservient.

At Chestnut Street he looked south to Nathan Phillips Square. Egg shell hives in arcs for civic men, doubly across the sky, strutting tall over railway yards and Toronto harbour. Juxtaposed by Old City Hall, Lennox's monument, its red sandstone blocks hanging over Bay Street like a Victorian gorgon.

As he walked Ford imagined himself on top of a giant version of one of B.M.'s red balloons stopping short of building tops or floating just beneath thin clouds under miles of blue at will. He walked on and the balloon moved a mile above the flat-topped reinforced concrete squares and glass-decked architecture. Or on the way, say, to the moon, looking back, the streets below were part of a deliberate pattern, like a net, some streets right-angled, others stretching to follow, conquer, or alter nonartificial lines and contoured lifts of rivers, banks, ravines, or undulating, treeless forest floors for people's parks. Near the green and blue of the lake where great dark deltas fanned, the trim tight hem of the city edge, wide black highway slabs and north, another complex stitching, for, oh, one and all who needed fold free lines to complete the pattern and to save minutes every mile.

As he walked Ford saw only cars from his balloon perch, but cars

in lines and cars in crowds, like variegated corpuscles, feeding the urban organism. The city, a hard, shiny growth on the land, active with secretions at peripheries, but dependent on the corpuscles to keep it fed. Then he couldn't see the tiny, single arteries; rather, registered the data of their activity. And as Ford walked the city seemed a quiet, microscoper's cluttered slide: all around the thin, thin slices framed by Don Valley, 401, 27, the Gardiner. Expressly, the way to hem it in, the boroughed farmers town writ large, a leaky hem down Mississauga way, and in and out of the city, goods, goods, by truck, by train, by boat, by plane:

27 barrels of Bowie knives
 125 cases of revolvers
 16 gridirons, and a copy of the American constitution
 16 boxes of wooden nutmegs
 20 bushels of brass filings
 200 rocking chairs, and 1 dozen of spades
 A portable pulpit and two billiard tables
 18 gross of packs of cards
 1 religious tract
 2 chests patent pills
 1 mangle, a grind-stone, 16 sets of nine pins and
 A piano

on any day. The list reeled through his head and he laughed. Once he had explained to Cuttle over lunch that on August 1, 1788, His Majesty's Ship *Seneca* was in Toronto Bay, the delivery of deliveries (pshaw! Manhatten for twenty-four bucks indeed). Laden with 149 barrels of presents and provisions for the Indians: 24 brass kettles, 200 lbs. tobacco, 47 carrots, 10 dozen looking glasses, 1 hogshead containing 18 pieces gartering, 24 laced hats, 2,000 gun flints, 1 bale flowered flannel, and 96 gallons of rum. 1,700 pounds, he told her. His Majesty's Government would pay the price for an area of about 500 square miles which included

roughly one third of the present County of York. *THE TORONTO PURCHASE.*
Completed 1805 at the mouth of the Credit River.

"Very, very good, Ford; you get a star," Cuttle squealed.

And credit flows on, Ford now laughed as he walked. "Toronto will be a beautiful city if they ever get her finished," he had said to her.

He dropped to the street again, watched a cleaning machine, unemployed, moving by, on some journey to a city garage to clean the front-end brushes and to fill its water reservoirs again. He watched it move along Dundas West, followed it toward the place where Dundas West and Dundas East meet neutrally. The titanic stirring and snorting of the machine interested him as he moved with it. The great wheels carried the block of iron with its uplifted wire brushes. He saw the curbside pair of wheels crush a paper cup and leave it flat against the asphalt. He followed it all the way to Elizabeth Street watching its dreary, boiling anger in the mid-day heat. Then looking east, he saw the hotel that bore his name.

In the bus station's shadow he stopped. He had been walking fast. He went inside and looked for a telephone. The dime slid into the machine. He listened for the dial tone and then dialed.

"Gorelik Associates, good morning."

"Valerie Chiswin please. Can I talk to her now?"

He waited, and waiting to hear one voice, heard the clatter and thudding of hundreds of voices on the terminal floor, at wickets along the Edward Street wall, on blue-backed chairs in rows a flight above, at the door facing west that led to bus docks. And beside him a woman's

staccato voice announcing her arrival to another person somewhere a million circuits and a second away.

"Val?"

"Ford? Are you all right?"

"Can you go for lunch?"

"What's all that noise?"

"I'm at the bus terminal."

"So you are going to Colme then? Will you be all right?"

"Where can we eat?"

"I've only got a half hour. Do you need me to come with you?"

"Can you take your lunch break now?"

"I go downstairs to the cafeteria. When are you leaving?"

"I think two; I haven't checked yet. I want to go alone."

"I have to be back upstairs at one-thirty."

"Valerie,"

but the dial tone.

At the ticket counter the young man behind the waist-high partition spoke mechanically: "Two. Arriving Clinton four-fifty. Change busses at Clinton after a one-hour stopover. Arriving Colme six-twenty-five." As he spoke the man did not look up; reached for a blank ticket to scribble on and stamp.

"Thank you," Ford said at him turning away without explanation and moving toward the Bay Street exit; stopping, heading down into the sublumary lavatory buried beneath the main lobby. The nauseating stench of evaporated urine, old urinals spilling out of the walls like porcelain waterfalls or hollow altars.

Because public washrooms always made him nervous it took a long time to relieve himself. Old men chortled and belched here and there, going about their private toilets. One man held his little son up to a sink to rinse his hands. From one of the cubicles an old Indian emerged carrying a paper shopping bag soft and soiled from overuse. He went to the sink farthest from the other people and immediately issued a wad of phlegm into it. To Ford the Indian seemed accustomed to his remoteness. His baggy charcoal grey pants were splattered with dried mud and his old brown coat was frayed and torn at the shoulder. Ford watched him splash water over his hands and face and dry himself meticulously with a single paper towel. When the Indian passed close to him on his way out, Ford saw a red checkered shirt trailing out the top of the shopping bag. Very soon after, Ford followed in the same direction, back upstairs into the waiting room.

Gads, blue-nose Toronto! Simcoe said the Queen's Rangers were almost all from Connecticut, so they were hard workers. They did build roads, bridges, barns, taverns, mills. Some of the salmon in the once gin-clear Humber got caught in one of their biggest mills, the *King's Mill*, as muddy York, salmonless eventually (1300 miles to the sea), grew like a lusty slut; and the lakes, the Rideau, the Trent, the Thames, the Grand, were highways only for a while, Ford told Valerie. Toronto scorned Kingston and showed her butt to zesty Montreal. The mills prospered and a century later umpteen mining speculators built a road a million miles north. Gorelik was one of the speculators, Ford told her.

"It's a hog trough clean from Kirkland Lake to Front Street."

"Don't tell the people in Barrie that."

Gorelik Associates bought and sold gold and uranium and built a big square office building as close to Lake Ontario as prices-per-square foot would allow so that a century and a half after Simcoe ate squashed King's Mill salmon ends, Valerie got the tail end of the coffee out of the machine in the far corner of the Gorelik Building cafeteria buried below Church Street. The coffee grounds spluttered into the cups.

"You're Valerie's boyfriend?"

Ford nodded. He was thinking about the funeral and about the Queen's Rangers building mills up and down the Maitland River.

"I thought so. You don't look like you work here."

Ford considered his denim jeans, white short-sleeve shirt . . .

"I mean, I wish all the guys in here would dress informally. They look so squeaky clean and shaved, you know? And their suits get so

shiny in the bum from sitting around."

Ford nodded.

Marilyn was a massively anchored person. Her arm moved to lift a cigarette to lipsticked lips. Both her eyes moved too, to watch the cigarette coming. Then they closed while she drew in the smoke, deeply, evenly, and exhaled it generously just past Ford's ear. That pleased him: a well-oiled smoker, he thought.

"Valerie and me do telex on Tuesdays," Marilyn said.

"Mn," Ford answered, remembering his parcel on the table. He began to tear open the wrapper.

"Yeah, I taught her how; she's quick. She learned to dial easily and she never gets the tapes stuck like the other girls in steno pool. So we get to run all the tapes on Tuesdays. What do you do?"

"Not much," Ford answered grudgingly, pulling the wrapper off the book.

"Once we sent a telex to the girl in our Vancouver office."

"Don't you do that often?" Ford examined the British stamps on the wrapper.

"Oh yes, we do, but what I mean is that we did it just for a lark this time. The girl on the other end answered back. So every Tuesday since we make up something cute and send it out to her."

"Hmn."

"Last week she sent a good one, a question kind of like a joke, only we couldn't get the answer right away."

A nod.

"How do you lay a table?"

"Eh?"

"Oh we couldn't get it either so we asked Mancer Tully up in the mail room. He got it right away. He *would*."

"I see."

"Anyway, me and Val send off this answer Mancer gave us. Only Myrna the steno pool supervisor catches Val dialing Vancouver and asks who authorized a Vancouver message. So Val makes up this story about Wally Kairn, he's down in Accounts Payable, and how he had to check on an invoice from New Westminster, so the steno supe just says make sure you file it, so Val says certainly I always do, and right away. Then old Myrna takes off, only by this time somebody else got the line. We had to wait but it was too late when the line got clear. They're off for the day so we don't know whether it was the right answer or not."

"What's the question again?" Ford asked, leafing through his new book.

"How do you lay a table?"

"A table?"

"What do you think the answer is?"

"I couldn't say."

"We made up an answer."

Marilyn took another long drag, butting her cigarette delicately on the edge of the thick-glass ash tray in front of her. She smiled and finally sniggered:

"Carefully!"

She looked at Ford with a grave, enquiring blush.

Ford sat quite still, unamused, unprepared to acknowledge any understanding or pleasure. He merely frowned and stared at the small book that had arrived in the mail that morning. Marilyn waited like a sales clerk for a payment at prime time: her mouth open slightly, an imaginary palm ready to take the dough and tabulate it. She too finally frowned uneasily above her rigid smile.

The savage silence endured for part of a minute until Valerie sat down beside her, opposite Ford. Valerie slid a celophane-wrapped egg-salad sandwich across to him. Less impulsively she set a steaming cup of coffee by his right closed hand. He was distracted by the steam disappearing into the air from the tiny hole in the centre of the plastic lid.

Marilyn reported the joke. Valerie chuckled.

"He wouldn't find that very amusing, would you Ford?"

There was an awkward pause in the conversation. Valerie noticed the torn wrapper and the paperback on the table in front of Ford.

"Another book; just what we needed. What is it this time?"

"*Pre-Confederation Canada: An Eclectic Anthology*," Ford said sarcastically.

Just then,

"Oh Gerry! Ford, this is Gerry,"

slid in beside Valerie.

"Marilyn's fiance," Valerie added.

Gerry struggled with the plastic lid stuck to the polyethelene rim of his coffee cup. A little show.

Tiny craters were scattered all over his cheeks; once they must have

been wheelks of knobby white, Ford decided. Little red lumps poked about in the tangle of whiskers sprouting from his upper lip. The sides of his formidable nose were oily, reddish.

"Why did you buy that one? Couldn't you get it out of the library?" Valerie asked Ford.

"It looked good in Blackwell's catalogue. Besides, it's not available in Canada," Ford said impatiently.

"A book about Canadian history not available in Canada? Sounds likely," Valerie scoffed.

"You going to come between us?" bleated Marilyn, reaching behind Valerie, tickling Gerry who slapped her arm down playfully.

"Somebody's got to keep you two separated," said Valerie turning her attention away from Ford.

At that both Gerry and Marilyn laughed heartily, the former subsequently breaking into a deep-chested belch, slobbering brownish coffee at the corners of his mouth.

"Wrong tuu-be," he spluttered.

"You two going to get married when you get done school, Ford?" Marilyn asked suddenly, winking at Valerie.

"Jesus," Valerie said quietly.

Ford watched Marilyn's large jaw talking as he flipped the pages of his book. Gerry added:

"Can't hang out too long old bone, gotta concede sometime."

After each sentence Gerry bared his ample teeth, the upper lip curling playfully about the base of his nose, red gums gleaming in the artificial light, mischievous interrogation marks on his face. Their

voices droned and Ford began to drift. He imagined Marilyn grotesquely shaped with prehensile buttocks gripping Gerry by his great nose leading him in and out the door of the building they were now in, Gerry's voice muffled by the massive pink cheeks of flesh, snorts of breath slithering through a perpetual smile, his own face equally pink as if scrubbed vigorously every morning to fit the context of an immaculate white shirt. Ford imagined that the colour matched well that of his lady's ample tenderloins.

Valerie was watching Gerry talk and Ford watched her face: *Hela, Norse Goddess of Death . . .*

"Why do you call me *that*? What is it?" she had demanded in the tavern.

"He's been reading Norse mythology," Colby explained, chugging at his beer. "Actually, when he calls you *Hela* he's insulting you."

"Then you're a wraith of Norse magic, madam," Ford said to her slowly, "a *Valkyrie* of beauty; one or the other."

Valerie was confused, alarmed that she might be the butt of a joke she couldn't understand. Colby explained:

"You see, *Asgard's* the name of the home of the Norse gods. It's not like any heaven we civilized Christians might have dreamed up; *Asgard's* grave and solemn. The gods and heroes can fight all they want against the forces of evil but in the end it's hopeless. *Asgard's* supposed to meet with apocalypse so there's no salvation. *Valhalla's* like *Purgatory* and even it gets destroyed in the end; so the only thing a man can do to assure himself that he's alive is to perform one pure, unsullied act of heroism for some impossible cause because by slamming

himself against a lost cause he can leap into *Valhalla* a hero, dead, but undefeated. There's no heaven of rewards for Norseman. He doesn't need one to live on. Ford likes that; so he's really saying that you--"

"I don't understand what that's all got to do with me," Valerie interjected quietly.

"You see," Colby began in a slow, condescending voice, "there's no heaven any more and like the Norsemen we've got a choice: die defeated or die undefeated. . . there's nothing worth dying heroically for any longer, no sweet cause to go gung-ho about, no sweet ideals to make us heroes so the Norse guys if they were alive today would be fools because they'd beat their heads around and waste their blood for nothing because there's nothing left to die for; a guy just lives and lives until it's too much trouble for his lungs to breathe or his heart to beat."

"Live for the moment," Ford interrupted. "It's not all stern stuff Colby."

"You're so sombre about life," Valerie said, registering her only impression, still not understanding what Colby was trying to explain to her.

"What moment?" Colby asked.

"Every moment. Like right now; savour your beer, savour your eyes, your ears . . ."

"Savour your women!" Colby cried, raising his glass.

"Right!" Ford said loudly, reaching over to embrace Valerie.

"You are a wraith of Norse magic, madam," he had repeated softly, stroking her head.

He remembered finding her address written hastily on a *King George*

Hotel coaster and calling her on impulse the next day. They had gone to the cabaret at the *Hawk's Nest* on Yonge Street. He went to her flat on McDougall Lane and stayed two days before the landlord insisted that she pay more rent or ask him to go. He left reluctantly, but returned late at nights to wake her up.

"I was lonely," he said as she led him to her bed.

Sitting, listening to Gerry talking, a smile came to his face as he recalled leaving his toothbrush and razor in her bathroom a few weeks later.

"I've got two of each," he had explained. "I might as well have one set here for when I stay."

"But the landlord's going to kick me out!"

"Then we should get a place together," he suggested. And two weeks later they rented Niccolo Annis' second floor apartment.

She had been excited to penetrate deeply into his life so quickly. He remembered how she used to watch him at his desk reading pages of print which seemed like blocks of black to her, awed by his discipline and by the fount of strange words and ideas that came out of him in steady streams. One time she said,

"Sometimes I think that you're not talking to me, you're just talking and I happen to be here. I don't really understand half of what you tell me."

And then Ford was aware of Gerry's voice again, framed by a splintering laugh from Marilyn. The laugh reminded him of the cackle that had erupted from a teenage boy who had passed him as he was coming one time into the building to see Valerie. He had been looking at the corner

stone of the building: *Gorelik Associates Inc. 1937*; a greenish-blue patina on the bronze plate set into the bricks at the main door.

"Then I gave the creep a kick in the balls," the boy was saying to his companion.

"Right in the bar?" the other boy asked.

Then they passed quickly up the street laughing and cackling as the door leading into Valerie's office building whooshed closed behind Ford.

And here, Gerry still yapping and the others listening, he remembered Valerie, a Friday, May, near nine in the morning, an eager-beaver new employee. He had been walking with her gayly, like lovers on Centre Island Park looking for a reason for celebration. At the doors he bravely offered escort to the very desk of her new employment but she refused. He slid his hand under her sweater on the elevator going up and squeezed her breast. She grabbed at his crotch and they laughed into a kiss.

There was no vanishing point for the long hall's lines. It tapered to a bright rectangle in which tiny people moved. Girls on the elevator wore make-up and perfume, hair-do's: folds stuck together at the back in slightly varying egg-shaped surfaces, parallel hairs glued in unison. He had looked at the print-pattern of some of their blouses, blue stripes on white, starched at the neck, brassiere straps showing through meeting the broad white band under shoulder blades, holding invisible sizeless breasts and leaving red marks on the skin. And now he remembered the cross-your-heart brassiere Valerie had bought for work. He laughed the first night when she took it off because the elastic made red marks like weld joints under her breasts. She threw it out the kit-

chen window and it landed in the elm tree branches and stayed there one week before it finally disappeared. In the midst of all this she had described her new working place so energetically:

"They've got carpets all over the offices. The machines are new carbon-film ones. They've got these three tropical plants separating me from the steno-pool. It's nice enough."

It had been a less indifferent time than now for Ford, a time when he often railed against the contradictions of civilized life. Their exchanges about her work started after she had been at it for a few weeks and began carrying home the first complaints. When he took her side against the bosses he'd never met, Valerie in turn defended them.

"They're nothing but lackies for the real owners," he assured her.

"Mrs. Clemenceau is all right, she treats us all right. Better than the old windbag who was our supervisor in the cataloguing room."

"Step out of line just once. Just once."

"She's a woman who's got a family of her own and she treats us as humanely as the job allows."

"What's humane about sitting in an office all day? Typing your brain into straight lines and wrecking your fingers filing? Everything you do's all forgotten within a fiscal year. Hell, within days."

"So what do I do? Quit? What's the difference if I work at the library or at Gorelik? Gorelik pays more money, that's the big difference. At least it's not boring all the time."

"You were doing the complaining, not me."

He remembered how their conversations meandered to dead ends and impossible conclusions or to hot decisions which challenged the value

of her daily bread, always leaving her paralyzed intellectually. All work: inane, valueless, disgusting.

"Look, somebody's got to grow the goddam corn in this world."

"Let the machines do it," he answered.

They used to reach silent impasses. She became robot-like in her exchanges with him, afraid to touch off a tirade against corporate heliotage. She had become like the receptionist at the front desk today:

"Yes sir? Can I help you?"

flesh-coloured lipstick wagging, her lips partly done. He had seen tiny colourless hairs on her upper lip and little wrinkles at the corners of her mouth.

"Yes, I'm looking for Valerie Chiswin. She's meeting me for lunch today."

The diffusion of the light from the ceiling against the shiny *Time* magazine cover, flat on an enamel table top. He crossed his feet under the cloth-covered couch and stared at the receptionist, catching fragments of her conversation while he waited for Valerie.

"Gorelik Associates, good morning . . ."

"Do you have an appointment sir?"

"Just one moment please and I'll put your call through . . ."

Behind her two small desks and young women with bent heads busy there, flapping pages from time to time and omnipresent the insidious and impersonal *Muzak*. His hand brushed against a cool leaf of the plant landscaping the corner beside him: elephant ears with nodules at intervals along the stem and pellet-pebbles, white, neatly about the base. Blue-black carpet under the square box holding unseen earth or substi-

tute which nourished the big plant. The carpet spread precisely in every direction interrupted by desk and chair legs. Though, popping like shiny, regular warts on a smooth flank, round-edged boxes, fist-sized electric outlets for busy IBM Selectrics with variable elements: pica/elite at the flick of a switch; and Burrough's Adders called desk computers now.

It had occurred to him that two centuries earlier there might have been birds' nests in one hundred foot maples and pines on the very spot.

The clicks and cackles of private secretaries' jokes winged down through headsets and push-button phones with holds; the other voices in other, hidden rooms, the low whine of an air-conditioning mechanism changing temperatures and behaviours automatically from walls away.

"They don't like visitors using the staff cafeteria you know," she said when she came.

"Then let's go out and eat somewhere else."

"I don't have time."

They followed secretaries and young men in pressed suits to the cafeteria. The women all carried patent leather purses and wore pantyhose all clear to the tenderloin. The cafeteria was entirely too small; smoke puffing a foot or so above seated head level.

"I came here to talk to you, not to listen to this clown," Ford suddenly said out of nowhere.

Gerry's monologue stopped, his grin and effervescence shattered. Marilyn looked down at the table.

"Don't get rude here, Ford," Valerie charged. "It's one thing to shoot off your mouth to your friends, but don't go doing it around here."

They eyed each other uncertainly for a moment. Marilyn lit another cigarette while Gerry, flushed, suddenly silent, attempted to smile:

"I'm sorry; I guess I talk too much. I didn't know it was a touchy subject with you guys. Just thought you two were planning to get married too."

"Gerry, Ford doesn't bring the subject up," Valerie said.

"It's not a subject," Ford added solemnly.

In the middle of the room a balding man laughed and talked with a group of women. Sideburns crept down his cheeks. He was bent awkwardly over their table, the folds of his pants turning his hidden buttocks into a prune-like surface.

"We'd better leave you two alone," Marilyn offered, shifting herself.

"No, no, stay. He's always snotty like that during lunch, aren't you Ford? Hell, you should see him at breakfast. You get used to it."

Ford turned his attention from the mountebank in the middle of the room and stared into his coffee. He smiled, affecting to consider the question, knowing it was rhetorical.

"I'm not like anything," he said finally.

They had never seen Ford until now. Marilyn and Gerry and others at Valerie's work imagined him from the descriptions over coffee and cokes as bearded and wonderful, swooping down on her at night, raping her mercilessly in a bed of books, strangely patterned silks and llama hides. They had envied her, the man-less ones.

"When does your bus leave?" Valerie asked.

"Two."

"It's getting late."

"I know."

"When's the funeral?" Valerie asked hesitatingly.

"Funeral?" Gerry cried.

"Ford's father died," Valerie said, looking up at Ford.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know; you should have stopped me from talking so much . . . if there's anything we can . . ." Gerry started to say to Valerie,

"Do," mumbled Ford.

"See you upstairs, Val," Marilyn said weakly.

Gerry left his half-empty cup on the table and followed Marilyn out of the cafeteria.

"Should I go with you to it?" Valerie asked, getting up.

"It wouldn't mean a thing to you," Ford answered.

There is now an urban nature too. There are strictly city birds who perish in the country: some rural hawk or crow might peck them to smithereens if they ventured beyond the speculated brush ringing any suburb. Or they would die of boredom. One, though, had recently dropped its unwholesome dung on the sidewalk near the doors to *Gorelik Associates*. In the fields around Colme it would never have been noticed, or if so, would not have seemed incongruous: but mixed with the honking-air-rushing-clacking-cracking roar that overwhelmed Ford when he stepped out of the air-conditioned building, and combined with the startling suddenness of a woman in a big, white hat passing in front of him, it helped make him feel nauseated. She looked so innocuous and distant for a moment; but the pigeon dropping was white too, and splatted on the sidewalk like a dribby meteor from some elfine asteroid belt. In this maelstrom Ford knew that he had not said good-bye properly to Valerie.

"Did you take the roast out?" she had asked him while she stood near the table.

"No."

She knifed him with her eyes, unconsciously fingering his unopened sandwich at the same time.

"Why wouldn't it mean anything to me?"

He sat there in silence. Finally he got up and left without a word, without a farewell, without a see you later; picking up his book defiantly. And now he stumbled into the sidewalk crowd like a bovine creature tripping methodically out to pasture. Swarming people rushing

around on lunch breaks annoyed him. They were flies.

A few minutes later he was headed again toward the bus terminal. He would swish his tail around to knock the fruit flies off his head; but then he was quite still like a woman who is suddenly aware that a wasp has entered a large room and who must wait to see if it will come out. Two men angled around him, no acknowledgment, never eye to eye. The sidewalk was tessellated with moving legs, and arms carrying bags, and things in hands, and hands probing inside suits. Like a clammy bat charging the sidewalk swarm carried him past a parking lot, bowling alley, restaurant, parking meters one after the other, parked cars, moving cars, forward . . .

"You have thirty minutes sir; boarding bay four at two o'clock."

He walked over to the travel brochure display: *Casa Loma, Old Fort Henry, Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons, Peterborough Liftlocks, Trent-Severn Canal, Niagara Falls . . .* and he pulled out *Huronian: Towns and Villages of the Land of the Huron Indian*. A young man began leafing through the brochures right next to him. Ford slipped the *Huronian* brochure, done up as if a mid-nineteenth century handbill, into his book. He turned around and looked for a place to sit. A queue of travellers clumbered around the information desk. The attendant pointed the way for a little Italian woman in inappropriate ulster coat. A young girl, she was as general to him, skipped by garishly dressed in a floor-length cotton extravaganza. The itch of action was on the faces of them all. Each announced departure caught them straining, ready to load luggage on backs and arms in unthinking dashes for the best seats: nearest the front/ nearest the back/ beside the window/ alone/ beside a

girl/ beside a boy. One elderly woman sat near Ford on the waiting room bench, replete with aplomb, silver-blue hair, patient, occasionally picking at her nose. Ford watched her red-tipped fingers caressing the handle of a blue suitcase. Rubicund cheeks feigned the kind of health found in country women on farms near Colme, but Colme health, he knew, undermined annually and cumulatively by the oppressive humidity that stuck like tar to old machine joints, old joints bending to meet plodding and profitable farm contracts. He wondered what history she might have behind her eyes, what dramas were there unspoken. Serried in this waiting place nevertheless she and the others protected their separate missions and intended to claim and maintain their territories outside the bus's door and on the moving bus for miles and hours together. The lady with the blue suitcase stared at him. He got up impulsively, a little angry.

Ford went to the *Ford Hotel* across Bay Street to drink draughts and watch cleavages. The bar-girl who brought him his second drink had on a halter that barely covered her nipples. Maybe she's vain, Ford was thinking, but then he considered the rather cardboardy silken material of her costume. If they move around in there, that'd perk 'em up, he giggled to himself.

The bar was very dark, soft thick atmosphere, plush carpets and red-dish lights.

He ordered a screwdriver and when she bent over to pick up a coaster her breasts hung very big toward the table. He drank back the vodka and orange juice and spent his last two dollar bill ordering another. When she returned he let her keep the change and watched her walk away. Al-

ready his head felt light. He looked at the rows of bottles behind the bar and behind the bottles with a frame the same colour as the mahogoney, a photographic mural, in two parts. He read the sign underneath patiently:

*Plan of York as Mrs. Simcoe knew it, after
the survey by A. Aitkin, 1793. Dots show
modern streets and shore-lines.*

*Plan for the enlargement of York as amended
by order of His Honor the President, projected
in lots containing an acre, more or less.*

In Council at York, June 10th., 1797.

Ford stared at the mural and started tracing the streets: Palace Street (formerly King Street, the small print said), King Street (formerly Duke Street), Duke Street, Duchess Street, New Street, Church Street, Toronto Street, Bay Street, York Street . . . Ford imagined the garden plots plowed under to make cart trails.

Simcoe's penchant for naming, he muttered to himself; but John Graves didn't like *Indian* names.

"It was *his* intention," he remembered saying once to Cuttle, "that Graves Simcoe meant to make the New World as British as could be expected. Newark for Niagara, York for Toronto."

Ford remembered a ditty he had often come across in his research:

*The grand old Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men;
He marched them up to the top of the hill,
And he marched them down again.*

Ha, Ford chuckled to himself at the bar still watching the mural map and sipping at his drink, Simcoe didn't get *Penetanguishene* or *Waubashene*. He flipped open his book with the brochures sticking out of it.

Even if they do call it *Penetang*, he said to himself, the town where criminally insane rapists are put away. But *Toronto Carrying Place*, the town where -- the old English bastard had to call it *YORK*!

His Excellency the Lt. Governor having received official information of the success of His Majesty's arms under His Royal Highness the Duke of York, by which Holland has been saved from the invasion of the French Armies; and it appearing that the combined Forces have been lately successful in dislodging their enemies from an entrenched camp supposed to be impregnable, from which the most important consequences may be expected; and in which arduous attempt his Royal Highness the Duke of York and his Majesty's Troops supported the national Glory; It is His Excellency's orders that on the raising of the Union Flag at Twelve O'clock tomorrow, a Royal Salute of Twenty-One guns is to be fired to be answered by the shipping in the harbour, in respect to His Royal Highness, and in commemoration of the naming of this Harbour, from his English Title: YORK.

Toronto-Teiaigon-Carrying Place; *Fort Rouille* if seniority would have it, Ford thought.

He closed the book and pulled at his pockets looking for another bill. He stepped up to the bar and set down five quarters and two dimes. The bar tender poured him another screwdriver.

"Brule came through in 1615," Ford said, pointing to the map.

"So many names it's been called: *Tadenac*, *Lac Contenant*, *Lac St.*

Louis (God save the goddam French King too!), *Lac des Entouhonoronons*, *Lac des Iroquois*, *Cataraqui*, *Contario*, *Lac Ontario*, *Lac Frontenac*; you know, *Frontenac*? like in Quebec City? They all can't have a piece of the pie; better the English wouldn't you say?"

"Than the French you mean?" the bar tender replied.

"Than the Yanks for Christ sake, than the Yanks."

"Right, better than the Yanks anyday. You know, those guys come in

here expecting *par* for their goddam money?"

"Once they had the *President Madison* and the *Oneida* . . ."

"Which?"

"They're battleships, Yankee men-of-war; yeah, right out there in Lake Ontario, three miles out, that's all; pounded the piss out of York, burned the legislative buildings clear down to their log foundations."

The bar tender wiped the counter top, pursed his lips.

"There should be something on that in here," Ford said, leafing:

*Nothing but the shouts of the rival combatants,
the war-whoop of the savages, and the echo of
bugles, mingling with the scattering reports of
the musketry.*

"What's that book?" the bar tender asked, still shining up the mahogoney.

"An anthology of documents: you know, important pieces of stuff from Canadian history. It's got things from up in the archives in Ottawa reproduced in here . . ."

"We beat them, eh?" the bar tender said walking away.

"Yanks took the Parliament Building mace," Ford called after him.

"Four days in York among the barbarians; four days and they got our mace just like that!" but he was talking to himself. He stared into the shiny counter top, his head swimming with the drinks he had guzzled so quickly. He imagined red coats and white wigs in the mahogoney:

*Commodore Chauncey: You don't mean to say . . . and
during an occupation!*

*Colonel Cromwell Pearce: Indeed, sir. We found it
hanging in the Chamber of Legislature. Clearly vul-
gar, barbaric, primitive. This war can be a war to
end all wars on the North American continent. 1813,
the year of peace, finally. I shall see to it.*

Dr. Strachan: Gentlemen, it is not, most emphatically NOT, a human scalp. It is a government hairpiece, magisterial.

General Dearborn: That is impossible to accept, my dear conquered pastor of St. James. You British-Canadians have odd symbols, I realize, but THIS?

Commodore Chauncey: We found it, you say, Colonel Pearce, hanging in the place of honour near the location of the clerk of the assembly? Clearly, clearly, indicative of the bloodthirsty and wanton barbarism of Upper Canadian Parliamentarians.

Dr. Strachan: But Gentlemen. It is white, like the Crown Wig. It is curled and prepared like the Government Wig. It is the Magisterial Wig. There is no human skin, no human blood, no verifiable connection between this hairpiece and a rational man's head! I implore you --return it at once!

General Dearborn: A white wig, you say. And not a scalp? Hmm? A wig if necessary but not necessarily a wig. Who wore it?

Commodore Chauncey: Let us take their symbol to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland where it will serve as a reminder of the atrocities of the Upper Canadian Legislators.

But time heals all wounded Whigs, Ford thought to himself stupidly, sucking at the empty screwdriver glass.

Franklin D. Roosevelt: Return, I say, return the British-Canadian symbol to its rightful symbolists on this great occasion of the centennial of Toronto: a great celebration of its incorporation as a city. 121 years in exile is long enough. We must give our northern unguarded neighbours a new deal.

Ford left the bar, his mind chattering with the mental pantomime. The sun squinted his eyes mercilessly on the street. The Balloonman was peddling candy apples at the Bay St. door to the terminal. B. M.

smiled when Ford passed.

The bus at the busy bay was running, ready to go away, the driver checking tickets, loading baggage. Ford was last to get on. He could tell by the way the driver looked him over that the liquor must be noticeable; and no luggage either, he thought to himself.

10

The Gooderham Building at Wellington and Front Streets looks funny, round-ended and so narrow fat men can't live in its front-most rooms. Ford had heard the area referred to as the Coffin Block and when the bus rolled by on the Gardiner he looked down at it. And below, in glimpses on curves, a railway track snaking between and among the stations of the elevated expressway. The bus had been re-routed via the Don Valley because of massive construction tie-ups for the Spadina Expressway along Avenue Road and Highway 27. Toy-like pipes, like bulging blue veins in a wrist, skirted the Don Valley where it met the Gardner at the Colgate-Palmolive plant. A million gallons of toothpaste pasty white and sweet flowed invisibly through the buildings at the bottom end of the Parkway. The bus undulated past heading north away from the industrial deliberateness of east end Toronto toward the opportunistic towers along the Don River.

NOW RENTING 466-5321

a maze of sluggish letters bannered across the top of a hundred story block, impermanent residences for impermanent people.

A generation of transients!

Ford imagined the mayor murmuring into a City Hall luncheon microphone:

*and we'll serve them. . . what variety!
what vitality! what opportunity! what a
cornucopia of different goods to fill them!*

A doppler whoosh as the bus soared through the Lawrence Ave underpass, the Don River plodding by below to the left, light standards stark and symmetrical for miles

LAWRENCE AVE EAST ONLY

LAWRENCE AVE WEST KEEP LEFT

three lanes north and three lanes south, snug carpet-like grass growing around concrete tunnels under embankments.

Eglington, St. Clair, and further east the bumpy roll of house tops, a continuous perspective. He imagined trains stopping at each corner to gather the paper money generated by the hundred thousand homes serried across the Scarborough hills; and developers on southern islands waiting at airports for the deposits to arrive: national heroes with fair hairy arms around glamorous women whose lubricant cunts were plopped in soft sand on Freeport beaches. Ford listened to the wheel-hum feed his invective. And, as often in his imagination, he pictured the land a century earlier, two centuries earlier, a thousand years earlier. And, as always, the indefatigable malaise, the puncturing, flattening ennui of the altered land, the changed churned up land.

He chucked his head up and his direct and chilly gaze eased into a smile.

"So what?" he muttered to himself reaching up to test the light switch.

Shrewdly designed seats, he thought; the illusion of privacy. The tiny magnifying lense of the night-reading-light glowed a dirty orange. Across the aisle were a plump woman and a little girl, the girl sitting excitedly on the very edge of the bus seat, one hand on the arm of the seat, one hand reaching ahead to the back of the seat in front. Whining, howling diesel engines underneath the floor boards; and behind him some-

where muffled voices and coughing. He closed his eyes and pressed the button at the lip of the arm. The back yielded as he pushed against it, reclining himself. Then he released the switch and the seat righted. He was alert to the sounds around him, especially the sound of a dry crunching. He looked across to the girl whose hands were full of potato chips.

The bus swung around the clover leaf and picked up speed on the 401, *MacDonald-Cartier Freeway*, stretching across the top of Toronto, part of the commercial artery of southern Ontario, right through the belly of the bottom half of the province from Windsor to Montreal non-stop. Or Chicago to Quebec City by extension making real a century and a half later Simcoe's idea of a mercantile empire moving laterally, through the province east and west instead of north-south with the river and lake systems. Burlington Bay to the forks of the Thames, Simcoe's *Dundas Street*, Highway 2, and now, in the smaller space age, the Mack'n Jack, Fort Detroit inseparably connected by four lanes at 70 m.p.h. with every major city for four hundred and fifty miles, the chequered plan for land grants spreading carelessly on both sides of the artery, new owners and new forms of an old scheme. One million bucks a mile. At the Spadina Interchange, twenty-seven bridges and miles of looping, swooping, swerving ramps and runways for cars to take off in four directions at the same time and without stopping -- keep the traffic moving.

"Spaghetti Junction!" Colby had called it one day as they flew through it at seventy-five in B.M.'s Oldsmobile on the way to the International Airport: loops and swirls as pretty as any flower.

Dufferin St., Keele St., Jane St., and finally the 400 north to Barrie, once the prestigious route to Holland Landing for connections by water to Lake Simcoe and points north and west through newly broken farms; now the route for the annual motorized invasion of the lake country of the Haliburton Highlands and Georgian Bay.

"So much stuff sticking up on the ground," Ford said to himself sitting in the bus imagining ancient fields.

He looked across at the little girl who nibbled at her chips, thin, wrinkled, roasted potato bits. She placed one into her tiny mouth and devoured it greedily; then another, and another, her little hand plunging deeper and deeper into the crinkly yellow bag, drawing out salted chips: chomp! chomp! chomp!

The Toronto International Airport to the right, ringed by suburbs, with jets coming and going, *TWA*, *Air Canada*, *CP Air*, *Lufthansa*, *Eastern* taxiing on runways, massive, concrete and exact similes. An *Air Canada* jet with the big red maple leaf on its tail fin blasting black clouds behind it, the scream of its turbines throbbing into the bus, the jet trembling somewhat just before lifting off near the end of the pavement and finally jumping up slightly, up, up, pushing into the air.

The little girl's chewing caught Ford's attention again. He wanted to bellow at her like a high school teacher habituated by the policeman-entertainer role, anxious to be creatively didactic,

"Stupid little girl; don't you know that potato chips will rot in your round little belly?"

A microcosm of the consumptive society, he would tell her, devouring

them flake after flake, one after another ravenously, like a wretched and emaciated refugee. Those potato chips have no nutritive value and they are expensive, indulgent!

"Your compulsive chomping annoys me!" he cried to himself.

She was smiling at him.

"Little snit!" he mouthed silently, and turned away again, suppressing his contempt for the girl, acknowledging his confusion, thinking to himself,

"I eat the goddam things too!"

He opened his book and tried to read. But he was too impatient. He charted out his route mentally: first by 401 to Kitchener, then by Highway No. 8 to Stratford, Seaforth, Mitchell, Clinton. Then a stop-over. Finally No. 4 north to Colme.

He closed his eyes and folded his hands around the book on his lap. His head was light. He began to imagine the mayor at his luncheon again, leading the aldermen and guests in prayer, Oscar Scaglione prominent among them:

The people shall stand to make their pledge to the Covenant.

The Mayor shall say: To maintain our allegiance to this our City.

The People shall answer: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To defend it from the disgrace of cowardice and of dishonesty.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To guard it from the shame of unrighteous greed and self-seeking.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To hold unbroken the fellowship of those who labour for its perfecting.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To encourage within it the spirit of brotherly love and of kindness.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To revere and observe the City's Laws.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To hand on undimmed its best traditions.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Mayor: To keep the annals of our City pure and honourable and to work and pray that Toronto may become in very truth a City of God.

People: We pledge ourselves by the help of God.

Now Ford's eyes were open and he stared into the back of the seat ahead.

He chuckled to himself about the mayor's prayer. Again he opened his

book randomly. He looked up a section dealing with precentennial

Toronto:

Fifteen years after Toronto's incorporation as a city, an enterprising cabinet maker built four six-passenger omnibuses and inaugurated Toronto's first public transportation service over a route extending from St. Lawrence Market, via King and Yonge Streets, to Yorkville, near Bloor Street: Toronto Transportation Commission.

for eighty-six years without interruption, the Consumer's Gas Company served the city of Toronto before its first explosion

Power is supplied by the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario to the co-operating municipalities at cost and the rate schedules used by the municipal Hydro utilities are likewise based upon the principal of service at cost. 757 municipalities are served including 47 cities of which Toronto is the largest, 126 towns, 369 villages, 565 townships. Rural electric service is given in 372 rural power districts which are economic unit areas and include

C.G.E. organized by a group of far-sighted Toronto businessmen and since has taken the leading part in the manufacture of electrical equipment and appliances to meet the rapidly increasing needs of the Canadian people. In 1812

Jessie Ketchum went into the business of tanning hides at what is now the southwest corner of Yonge and Adelaide Streets. There was at that time in the town of York a blacksmith, a wainwright, a candle maker, a clock maker, a hat maker and a cobbler, but Jesse Ketchum's tannery was the first extensive industry. At an early date he acquired all the property now bounded by Yonge, Bay, Queen, Adelaide Streets which was then far remote from the town proper, and built for himself a home near the present Ryrie Store

Business

in the days before Confederation was not so complex as it is nowadays in the federated Provinces. Then cities were small and isolated. Communications were difficult and interests were more purely local. Foundations, though, have been soundly laid, and with the certain development of Canada during the years to come Toronto's progress in wealth, influence, population, should bring satisfaction and pride to the businessmen and administrators who had contributed so effectively to the sound position which the City occupies today

Oliver Mowatt Sir
subscribed for
the first line, a private circuit connecting his
office with the old Parliament Buildings.

Soon after Messrs. McGaw and Winnett signed the first contract for an exchange telephone, bringing service to their Queen's Hotel. The forty original subscribers soon increased so that the tiny exchange at No. 10 King St. with its lone operator was inadequate. New headquarters were secured on Bay Street. At present there are upwards of 25,000 of these long distance voice paths terminating here. Local exchange calls average 15,000,000 per day of which 13,800,000 are dialed and 1,200,000 are completed on a manual basis. Long distance calls originating in Toronto average 600,000 daily; of these out-of-town conversations some 500,000 are for far-off centres while 100,000 are to nearby points like London.

Remember wherever you live in Toronto there's a United Cigar Store or Agency near you

As a word 'Kodak' is simply a combination of letters made up from the alphabet to form a short, euphonious name that would easily dwell in the public mind. When the word 'Kodak' was created many years ago it meant nothing

homeward journey
westward journey
western visitors

with a pleasant sail on the ships of the Company's Northern Navigation Division which operates between Detroit, Windsor, Sarnia, Port Arthur, Duluth, with head offices on Bay Street, rates for carrying automobiles are surprisingly low

LOBLAWS Groceteria Markets constitute a city within a city

DOMINION Stores now have over 1,000 branches including Toronto stores for thrifty housewives throughout eastern Canada

IMPERIAL OIL operates out of Toronto Brown bear feeding on the hill-side, caribou grazing on the plain, moose thrashing through the evergreens, know these birds and their staccato song IMPERIAL for each month alert young men fly many thousands of miles and keep watch and ward over our forests and fisheries, map untrodden sodden wildernesses, speed in battle array to combat forest fires supplies of Imperial gasoline and Marvelube motor

*oils are maintained at remote points so
that these fliers*

*in 1901 the first
Oldsmobile made its appearance two years
later a Cadillac was seen on Yonge Street
and in 1908 McLaughlin Carriage Co. pre-
sented the original McLaughlin. Today there
are 1,000,000 motor vehicles in and around
Toronto of which one out of three was built
by General Motors, General Motors celebrating
sixty-five years, extends congratulations to
the City of Toronto and cordially invites Queen
City Motor Residents to consider the GM mark
of excellence now on display at dealers' show-
rooms everywhere*

until he was bored with running his eyes along the lines.

"Unbroken fur-trading land -- trees all over it and now the
Mayor's City of God," Ford said to himself, turning his head to one
side, leaning back against the seat, drifting off, the bus moving west
toward Kitchener, the city sinking behind him.

Part Two

11

The word 'public' sounded odd to Ford. *Public* schools seemed remote and not of the elect. There were no familiar statues of the blue and white Virgin, nor of the meek St. Joseph in his brown and white gowns, to be found in their halls and priests were never seen to enter their schools or to leave them. Protestant kids did not get out for Holy Days: *All Saints, the Immaculate Conception, the Epiphany, the Circumcision* . . . Protestant boys swore: hell, damn, shit, piss, fuck. They were reputed to have seen girls completely naked by at least grade two. And Protestant girls were worldly and bold.

"You've got three legs, ha, ha," one Lorne Avenue Public School hussey squealed at Ford on her way by.

Protestant boys and girls never wore medals or made ejaculations on the way home from school:

*Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death, Amen.*

Seven years off the prison of Purgatory and seven more years in the abode of bliss. Sure cure premiums for avoiding the inevitable: hurled howling into hell. Ejaculations and indulgences were inoculations against the foul fiend and it was rumoured that if they were recited in Latin, the time off doubled.

Ford explained to Elaine one day after school as the three of them were eating canned spaghetti that he had four thousand years saved up and would part with two thousand if she would give him fifteen cents to buy a pea shooter and peas.

"But all the guys have got them now," he protested as his mother scowled.

"That'll be something for you to confess to Father Costello on Saturday," she said.

Bless me father, for I have sin. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It has been three weeks since my last confession. These are my sins. I swore six times, tried to sell my time off Purgatory to my sister once, touched myself impurely once, ate meat on Friday three times . . .

"Anything else my son?"

I hit Sister Oliva's wimple with a snowball once.

"Sister Oliva's wimple? Why my child?"

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest my sins above every other evil because they displease Thee, my God, Who are so deserving of all my love; and I firmly propose by Thy . . .

"No, no, no, by boy; purpose, not propose!"

and I firmly purpose by Thy holy grace never more to offend Thee and to amend my life amen.

Ford's mother waited near the chancel. He knelt down dutifully in a pew to say his penance, conscious of his audience.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

Seven times; and seven times:

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will

*be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and
forgive us our trespasses and deliver
us from evil. Amen.*

On the way home, walking briskly along Dundonald Street to keep up with his mother, he did not feel any different for having received the sacrament of Penance. He said to her:

"The Protestants say: for Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever, Amen, don't they?"

She answered, "Yes."

"Why?"

Katherine was not given to conversations in public with her son. He stared up at her and wondered what sins she could possibly have confessed. He was tempted to compare penances.

On visits with his father in Colme, though, Ford received more satisfying answers.

"Was Hitler a king?"

"Hitler fought against kings."

"Why do people get married?"

"They want to have offspring."

"Offspring? Do you mean kids?"

"Yes. Off-spring; kids spring off from their parents."

"Why don't you think I should be a priest?"

"When I met your mother she used to say her goddam rosary every morning. She should have been the priest of the family."

Their discussions also included talk of how to get rich. Anyone who knew ol' Ernie Giffen the Purina traveller also knew that he was

consistently in the process of getting rich. Ford's father liked to make money fast and he liked to talk about making money fast.

"I've got two dollars and ninety cents saved for a bike," Ford told his father.

"I'll double that," Ernie Giffen replied, "and anything else you make this summer. We'll go right to the factory in Toronto and get you a new bike when you've got enough money."

"I made it cutting lawns last week but she won't let me stay out past seven and I never have any time before supper," Ford told him.

His father showed him an easier way. Ford started with Mrs. Fisk the first week of his and Elaine's two month stay with their father in Colme during the summer of 1957. But even as he rehearsed the pitch his father had prepared for him, he wasn't sure what kind of money he would get.

"I sounded her out, dad," he reported one evening when his father got back home from a sales trip. She had agreed that the scheme was a boon to widows.

"Didn't I say so?" his father said, smiling, rattling the ice in his glass. "But you better get her to pay in advance."

"Ten dollars?" Mrs. Fisk had protested.

They haggled it down to six and Ford poked out an agreement on the typewriter his father had in the living room:

*I, Ford Percy Giffen, age 11, contract
to 1) cut the lawn when it needs it
2) cut the hedges when it needs it
3) weed the garden when it needs it
price: \$6.00 per month --July, August 1957
from: Mrs. Fisk, 343 Shuter Street, Colme, Ont.
signed: Ford P. Giffen, age 11, and Mrs. Fisk*

which undated contract Mrs. Fisk signed, impressed by the little businessman from the big city visiting his father for the summer.

"And how is your mother?"

"Fine."

"In advance," he said finally, but agreed to a one-week trial.

His father poured him a weak whiskey in the kitchen.

Ernie was delighted with his son's enterprise. But Ford wished often that his mother could be in Colme to see his success. He knew, though, that his parents' split was firm and final, a taboo topic for him and Elaine.

"You can tell him that we're very happy on our own," she had instructed them to report.

In Colme Ford listened patiently to other schemes designed to improve the profitability of the lawn and garden care business. Ford's customers acknowledged to his face just how clever a boy he was. They knew his mother and father. Many of them asked about his mother.

"Fine," he would say.

The summer before Katherine Giffen suddenly took herself and her children to live in Toronto, Ernie had sent Elaine and Ford up and down the mapled, oaked streets of Colme supposedly cutting lawns. In fact, they were demonstrating the only remote-controlled electric lawn-mower in Canada for their father who held this nation's first franchise for the product. It was a remarkable machine, however prone to burning out its motors (one on each wheel) and cutting its many cords occasionally. It had no handle, consisting, rather, of the cutting blades, two wheels, two motors and two hundred feet of cord. For storing and transporting

the heavy cord an owner could wrap it neatly around two prongs which attached to the blade housing. Curious and coveting customers couldn't believe their ears or eyes. Ford gave them business cards. He was having more fun operating the machine than selling its services. Their father had instructed them to collect no money.

"You'll get a commission later," he explained to them.

The word *commission* sounded not only vague and complicated to Ford, but also unsure and distant.

"No charge," he said, then, when the first customer offered a dollar bill to the two children standing in the middle of the freshly manicured lawn.

They cut twenty lawns in six summer days. Ford's father followed up the easy leads for seven fast sales on a Sunday and a Monday.

"By the way, got any lemonade?" was part of the pitch as Ford pressed control buttons on the six inch by eight inch control box. The machine buzzed about the lawn chomping voraciously while Ford and Elaine squabbled over who would run the control panel, avoiding bushes, elms, maples, oaks, lilac bushes, terror-struck dogs, at the flick of a switch, and all the while plugged into the customer's own socket.

Ernie Giffen continued to want his son to see the angles, to see the possibilities for entrepreneurship.

"Nope," he announced firmly to Ford at the beginning of the summer.

"Why not? What'll I use then?"

"You'll have to find a way to get your own."

"But you promised to match my money for a bike."

"That's right."

Ford needed a power mower for his new lawn business. Stern Lloyd Ackert at the hardware store leaned over his counter:

"No credit son. Your father will have to come down and arrange something."

Ford went directly to Eddy Arnold's house three doors up from theirs on the River Road.

"Wanna make a buck?"

That day Ford helped his old school friend with papers. They delivered thirty-two *Toronto Telegrams*. At each stop Ford made his pitch and eventually had solicited nineteen new customers at varying prices for his lawn and garden care operation. Eddy got his dollar and a part-time job as well. Three new customers paid in advance for a total of twenty-two dollars. JUST LIKE THAT! Ford borrowed Eddy's parents' mower temporarily. It was the first week in July.

By the second week he had twenty-four customers and over one hundred dollars in cash pre-payments. Lloyd Ackert called Ernie Giffen on the weekend to ask about the source of Ford's cash, presented proudly, he said, in new tens, for a used *Lawn Boy* mower.

The work load increased and soon proved excessive for Eddy and Ford. They had twenty-four lawns to cut every two weeks, twenty-one gardens to weed every week, twelve hedges to trim every third week. Ford's overhead shot up. His father advised him one weekend to keep it at a minimum.

"How?" Ford asked impatiently.

Overhead: July

1. gas for mower	\$4.50 per week
2. hedge-clippers	3.50
3. 3-in-one oil	.69

4. rake 2.00
5. hoe 1.95
6. spark plug spare .65
7. Eddy wages (65¢ hr. @ 8 hrs. wk. = 5.20)
8. Patty wages (55¢ hr. @ 6 hrs. wk. = 3.30)
9. Larry wages (45¢ hr. @ 4 hrs. wk. = 1.80)
10. Wilfred wages (45¢ hr. @ 4 hrs. wk. = 1.80)

"The idea is to get somebody else to do the work while you do the thinking," Ernie told his son.

Ford's profits continued to decrease. In the third week he had to settle a dispute between Larry and Eddy over the mower. Ford decided to make Eddy the mower and Larry the weeder.

"But you weed better than Eddy does!"

Larry quit.

During the fourth week and just after collecting the next round of pre-payments, Ford was back at Ackert's asking for credit:

Equipment

1. two Lawn-Boy mowers @ 69.50
2. four rakes @ 2.00
3. two hoes @ 1.95
4. two hedge clippers @ 3.50

and set one hundred dollars in twenties on the counter.

Ford's little business was getting well known in Colme. He moved back and forth between the main street of the town and their house way out on the River Road sometimes three times in one day.

Mrs. Kincaid who lived two doors up on the River Road called Ford's father and asked if Ford could do a sample landscaping job. Ford contracted her for the month of August at \$9.00. The Colme Motor Inn on the south end of town plugged into the service at \$11.00 a month.

However, all through the next month Ford was short of operating

capital. He solicited and got more credit in order to keep his business going: wages, gasoline, repairs. At one point Eddy almost lost his toes when the mower blade gouged a chunk out of his running shoes. Ford often forgot about the bicycle.

He canvassed every family in town but the most he could squeeze out of the lawn and garden care market were thirty-seven contracts. His father showed him how to make up an income statement.

Statement of Income

37 contracts (@ varying rates)	284.00
equipment (depreciated at varying rates)	250.00
	534.00
payments: mowers (monthly)	55.00
wages (monthly)	55.00
garage rent	10.00
repair (monthly est.)	15.00
gas (monthly, 3 mowers) ..	24.00
	159.00

He wanted to pay out the mowers but his father advised against it. They drove to Owen Sound and bought a CCM three-speed with carrier, light and mirror. Ford paid cash for the bike and his father promised again to make good his offer.

By the middle of August when Elaine came back to spend the last two weeks of the summer vacation with her father and Ford, Ford was expecting a one-hundred dollar profit after all expenses except some of the lawn-mower payments. He had rented a small garage near *Ackert's Hardware* but on his father's advice sold the customer list for fifty dollars and the equipment for two hundred and fifty dollars in twenty-five dollar pay-

ments over ten months to Lloyd Ackert's oldest boy at the end of August. Ford paid out the mowers in cash and admitted to his father that he was glad to be out of the business before having to invest in shovels for the winter and having to find someone to run things while he went back to Toronto.

"And Eddy already wanted a raise," he said proudly.

"Three hundred and twenty-four bucks clear and a new bike. Not bad, Ford. Not bad," Ernie Giffen replied.

12

The bus coasted southwest down sleek 401 deep into the toe of the peninsula that juts into the United States: farther south than most of New England, than 'up-state' New York, than Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, and the State of Washington, than most of Michigan, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon; as far south as parts of Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Nebraska; or so said the bulbous Yank who spotted Ford alone with a book on his lap and came up the aisle to explain his itinerary.

"'Spose you don't want any company?"

He talked quickly.

"Skip Penbenny,"

stretching his a's and o's into nasal configurations.

"From Rochester."

Rah-chester, like yeah-Chester

It was Ford's sullenness that had attracted the American; a kindred soul Skip Penbenny had assumed. He loosened his tie, dug into a *Pan Am* flight bag to produce a mickey of Seagram's Five Star, and ambled over to Ford's seat. Ford closed his book and sat up.

"Wanna snort?" the American offered.

Ford sat with his hands folded on his lap. Skip Penbenny hid the bottle between his leg and the side of the seat after each slow drink.

"Don't have to hide it," Ford asserted quietly, pointing toward the driver.

"Hmn?"

"They don't care. Long's you mind your own business, no commotion."

It was like coasting: down toward Kitchener and London, south and west, the long-settled farms with the large red-brown barns, and on the side in huge white letters

E. M. FRESGO & SONS

and the like, readable from the highway even at seventy.

"You from Toronto?"

"Yes."

"Ever been to Rochester?"

"No, not so far," Ford answered automatically. A phrase from his thesis popped into his head:

Yankees and Covenanters, the most yeasty and unsafe of populations.

He was trying to ignore the American. He marvelled at how smoothly everything worked. The cars moved along at high speeds. What future historian might be impressed at the sheer convenience? The cars drifting casually into Service Centres -- ziiip! Roads ribboned up and down everywhere to every hamlet, town and city: all linked and accessible by hard-top with only vague memories in old timers' brains of earlier days, wheels in mud up to axle rods, a Saskatchewan wheat and poultry farmer exclaiming: "Good God, even the concession roads are paved down here!"

Ford began to consider the disadvantages of travelling to Colme by bus. There was, after all, a CN rail connection, and good hitchhiking because the highways were heavily travelled. He decided that the bus was clinical, sterile, hospital, each seat a territory of private circumstance, only burps, farts, and belly squirts to clip at the deadening drone of the wheels. No collaboration with the driver of the vehicle,

no matching destinations.

In the Service Centre in Preston Ford stayed in the bus while the driver and most of the other passengers left to find washrooms or to have fast snacks. He reached into his pants to scratch an itch at his anus and found himself completely alone in the seat. He took advantage of the privacy to stretch full length and to put his feet up on the back of the next seat. His eyes landed on a diesel truck: *HI-WAY MARKET, KITCHENER*. He got up, walked the length of the bus, back again; finally went outside. Scraped his soles on the pavement. Four islands of gas pumps, uniformed *Fina* men darting around cars, jabbing masculine pump snouts into female tanks, scrubbing bugs off windows, dancing around boiling radiators: as speedy as the plastic credit cradle cards could inspire.

The bus rolled on, turning north and west at Kitchener's Highway 8. At the outskirts of the small town of St. Jacob's Ford noticed a sign:

Caution: Non-Motorized Vehicle Traffic

A Mennonite family crowded onto the front seat of a horse and buggy, moving obliviously along the side of the road, cars roaring mere feet away. A large red triangle marker attached to the back of the buggy seat. The bus approached and passed allowing Ford only glimpses: black -- hat, beard, shirt, pants, boots, on the man. And the woman dressed in a long blue dress and lighter blue bonnet. Two children, small, wearing pants held up by suspenders: clothes centuries old, a life style chuckling against the pavement in a slow and intent motion, the horse's mane high and its feet trotting rapidly. The bus leaving the sudden carriage behind while Ford strained to watch. But the bus driver was merciless

and the gravel and pavement pulled by beneath in an unending, lulling monotone. There may be more of these people along here, Ford was thinking. And the picture postcard flashes frustrated him. He wanted more, he wanted to see the pores of their skins, to feel the thick callouses on their hands, to judge the naivety of their daughters. They were thistle seeds on a noisy sea of progress and pavement. Many more were bound to miscarry than their browned and assured faces suggested.

Ford's body was numbed by the drone of the wheels and the effect of the liquor he had drunk before getting on the bus. His head was buzzing like the entrails of a transformer. The American had returned to sit beside him again. Ford was on the shaded half, no country sunlight slipping through the tinted window in any case. The shoulder of the road, gravel, uneven, unfolding like a film . . .

"We won't show our holes," the American announced in a slur.

Ford grimaced. Skip repeated,

"Our holes, our holes: you know, mouth? right? eyes? ears, asshole? pisshole, cunthole?"

"Eyes are holes?" Ford asked indifferently.

"Certainly. Holes for light to get in; it goes in and out. We use some, discard some. We use some food, throw out the rest. World passes in and world passes out; food, air, water, light, sound, heat, cold and all the rest. In and out. We don't show our holes, though. We cover them up."

"Eyes?" Ford repeated.

"Yup. With frowns, not looking; and we forget how to see, how to respond. We don't let what we see come right in. We might as well just

have holes there. We're so worried about how others see us that our eyes fail us. We're a bunch of Kodak snappers filing our experience in rolls behind our ears; in cannisters!"

Ford nodded.

"And we cover our breasts and let out only what we figure can't be used against us at some future time, deny our friggin heart muscles, forget that they're shoving and yanking blood through us every damn minute. Who's aware of another guy's heart muscles, eh? Or some woman's? We don't even know women have got hearts, right? Stuck underneath their tits; we're consistently hiding our holes."

Ford nodded again.

Skip Penbenny wrinkled his forehead. Another aphoristic jab:

"Consistent people are bores."

Ford, silent.

"I mean, they don't have surprises. They're predictable. Me, I'm unpredictable."

Ford turned away and began watching the fence posts, imagining himself jumping from one to the other as fast as the bus though suddenly realizing that he would have to rely on their being there one right after the other if he were to move along them at that speed. Getting there on his own steam, post by post, his head feeling syrup-thick, getting at the moment, lines from a poem jumping up:

*Why does the horse-faced lady of just the unmentionable age
Walk down Longacre reciting Swinburne to herself inaudibly?*

This road is a city road, Ford thought to himself. It's not a country road in the way that country roads are *country* roads. The MacDonald-

Cartier Freeway doesn't serve the country, he decided to himself; it serves the cities at opposite ends of the country or in the middle, at the peripheries. Cities never in the country, never *contained* by the country, as if the country should inevitably turn into city. The 401 stringing them together like tubers, and cities like tubercles.

"I bought it duty-free at Queenston Heights," Skip said, waving the Seagram's Five Star bottle. Ford accepted a swig.

"Sight-seeing," Skip said. "Going the long way around to Detroit. Not many would think to take this route, going via your Bluewater Highway and along Huron, I mean. Got a teaching job in Dearborn; Dearborn College." He regurgitated his curriculum vitae somewhere in the midst of his disconnected monologues.

Ford decided that he could hear the man through his ear hole, but his brain was a bag of crockers just the same; clear white shiny ones with the butterfly leaves in the middle; and his thoughts were all rain-bowed and distorted like diffused light on a technicolor screen. They ground around brilliantly. Ford wanted Highway 8 to remember its Indian trails.

13

She was unaccustomed to sustained expression, little phrases coming out between long pauses, gestures instead of words.

"Be reasonable Katherine, I can drive them back for a third the cost."

He could see her shaking her head, narrowing her eyes. The conversation had gaps.

"I'm coming into Toronto to get some stock anyway."

"Do as you wish," she said and hung up the telephone.

The Chrysler sailed down Spadina. They stopped at a *Dairy Queen* to buy caramel-topped cones for thirty cents each. Ernie licked at his awkwardly, holding it with one hand, the other hand lightly holding the square-shaped translucent steering wheel. FM music came from the radio like *Muzak*. They turned onto College Street and went east as far as Church Street. For Ford it was smooth and exciting to be in such a big car on Spadina, on College. On Wellesley Street, one block south of Katherine's apartment, Ernie parked, turned sideways in the seat to speak to Ford and Elaine.

"Remember you can come home anytime you want. Just call me up collect on weekends. I'll come and get you. Promise?"

"What about mom? She'd be mad if we came back too often," Elaine said.

Ford rubbed the side of his nose; a smear of soft ice cream had caked there.

"Yeah," he said, "she doesn't like us coming."

"Just come if you want to. Don't worry about your mother."

Ernie reached into his suit coat pocket and pulled out a long manilla envelope.

"What's it?" Ford said.

"Open it."

Ford counted thirty-five dollars in fives.

"But the bike only cost sixty."

"Five bucks interest for waiting."

"Terrific!" Ford cried.

He could see the front wheel and one handlebar of his bicycle protruding from the trunk. The wheel was spinning slowly.

Ernie reached once more into his coat and gave Elaine a twenty dollar bill. He started his car up and drove very slowly, turning west into Dundonald Street. A candy-cart with balloons attached had gathered a crowd of children. They dribbled away from the cart, their hands and mouths filled with candy apples, popcorn bags, boodle bags. Some held balloons. Ernie maneuvered his car around the small crowd and pulled into the laneway in front of a two-storey brick house, one of many such houses in the area. The houses were a surprise to non-residents because of the gracious and inviting lines of their architecture. A home in a city, a large city; white wood trim, designed variously with carefully kept front lawns with Frost fences three feet high or short picket trim. Katherine and her two children lived in an upstairs flat accessible by a common front door. Down below, a large German family whose patriarch sat on the verandah smoking a pipe with wide-faced friends. They were

drinking malt liquor from bottles.

"See, we live up there," Ford pointed.

"I know; I've been by before."

"When? Our house?"

"When none of you were looking."

"But when?"

"I drive by every time I'm in town. Don't tell your mother, though. I saw you on the balcony once Ford."

"That's where my aerial is. It's a copper wire. I strung it across to the tree over there; I get *CHUM, CKEY, CHIQ, CHCH* . . . on my crystal set."

Ernie hesitated as Ford and Elaine rattled up the stairs ahead of him. The stairs were steep. There was the odour of lysol disinfectant everywhere. Saturday cleaning day no matter where Katherine lived. The door, walls and stairwells had recently been painted light green.

When Katherine opened the door Ernie stopped on the steps ready to retreat.

"Dad, don't go," Ford said, "I'll show you my room."

Ford kissed his mother on the cheek. She started to hug him but he disappeared into the kitchen. Elaine embraced her. Ernie still hesitated at the bottom of the steep stairs facing sideways like a stranger.

"Is my car okay in the lane?" he asked Katherine.

"Should be on the street or at the back," she answered politely.

"I'd better move it."

"It'll be all right for a minute or two," she answered, turning into the apartment.

He started to walk up the stairs until she turned around suddenly. She nodded; no words. He stepped reluctantly into the kitchen, like a vacuum cleaner salesman with a tenuous admittance, almost effervescent, and curious. Because of the children he felt a right to be present. He was anxious to see if she lived differently and determined to find her the same, her house the same. The apartment was small: two bedrooms, bath, kitchen, living room.

Ford's room was very small. The roof slanted acutely. The walls were neatly arranged with pin-ups: Maurice Richard and the Pocket-Rocket, Governor-General Vanier, Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth. Four straight rows of *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* cut out of newspapers, some of them yellowing. There was a stop sign stolen from some corner, and two bookshelves painted fluorescent red built from wrecker's bricks and discarded boards. Ford had also fixed a small night light above his bed. It was comfortable and organized in the room. There was no window.

"Not bad, Ford. Your mother let you keep all that stuff up?"

Elaine slept in the same room as her mother. A head-high panel partition separated their areas. Each had a three-quarters bed, a dressing table, a chest of drawers. The partition was built so as to divide the single window in the room exactly in half. Still, the room was grey. Even the bright blue frilled pillow cases and soft blue curtains could not pierce the sombre tone of the room. Elaine had set up a small piece of plywood on concrete blocks and orange crates by her bed. The construction was her desk. Ford built a double book shelf for her on top of the plywood surface and against the wall.

"Will you have some coffee before you go?" Katherine interrupted coldly.

At the kitchen table Elaine relayed greetings from Colme friends and spoke of the changes since they had been away: the new *Toronto-Dominion* bank across from the old *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce*, the new post office and the new facade at *Ackert's Hardware*. "And the *Red Front Grocery* isn't on the north end anymore; it's down opposite *Diagonal Road*."

Katherine listened with interest, but she was aware of Ford's silence at the table; he was toying with the ice in his glass of *Pepsi*.

It all seemed natural and unnatural to Ford, this discussion of Colme, their home: the unsettling and unquestioned assumption that the family split must endure. No one was willing to force the question into an issue that must be resolved.

"But why are we going to Toronto?" he had asked his mother repeatedly. Even on the *CN* train not ten miles out of town he continued to ask. Until his mother got angry. No amount of hostility between them justified his parents' splitting, Ford thought. At Brussels he waved madly at Erasmus Shelburn who sat on a wood bench in front of his father's Telegraph office on summer afternoons. Erasmus couldn't make out who was waving.

"We're going to your Uncle Robb and Aunt Paula's. We're going to live in Toronto now."

Ernie called Robb within one day of his wife's arrival there; but Katherine hung up on him. Ernie came home to Toronto in his car four hours later. They screamed at each other in the living room until Robb

asked Ernie to leave. Ford saw his father push Robb onto a couch.

Two weeks later they moved into the apartment on top of the old brick house with the gingerbread verandah.

"Hey, we almost forgot your bicycle!" Ernie said suddenly.

Ford and his father got up from the table and rushed down the stairs.

"Where can you store it so it doesn't get stolen?" Ernie asked Ford as he worked at the knot in the rope which held the trunk down.

Katherine watched them carry the bike up the stairs together. Ford leaned it against the cupboard. He and his father sat down to admire it.

"Where can he keep it at night? Not much room for a bike in here," Ernie said.

"We'll manage," Katherine answered.

"I wasn't suggesting that you couldn't," Ernie said.

"We're fine here!" Katherine cried. "The rent's paid on time. There's food in the fridge. We've got plenty of room."

"Katherine," Ernie began calmly, "there was always food and you never went without a roof over your head. And there *isn't* plenty of room in this two-by-four of a place for a goddam bicycle."

"It was *my* roof; and this is *my* roof!" Katherine said sternly.

Ford frowned while he fidgeted with his glass at the table. Elaine got up and took her cup and saucer to the sink. Then Katherine stood up. Ernie remembered the sudden colour that always came to her face when she was angry or passionate. He desired her suddenly but the impulse passed as she carried her cup and saucer to the sink and rinsed them.

She brought the milk jug, spoons, pumpkin tarts, sugar bowl, to the counter.

"Do you need any money, Katherine? Do you want to live in a bigger place?"

"We don't need your help. What are you thinking? Sending twenty dollars once every six weeks? IF the mood strikes you? Or do you think you can afford to seeing how you've got such a big debt to pay already?"

"I didn't lose the house. That mortgage was cleaned up in twelve months flat. You needn't worry yourself about that," Ernie answered angrily, clacking the side of his cup with a spoon.

"Well?" he asked again after a short silence.

"Well what?"

"Well do you think you can forget your pride long enough to accept some help? How long do you think you can hold out in this hole?"

"I told you," Katherine screamed, turning toward him, a tea towel pressed against her thigh, her fingers gripping it, "we don't need your money. This is our home! Not a, a hole, not some asset, some collateral so you can have your fun, some *brothel*!"

Ernie stood up now, Katherine's voice ringing in his head. He pointed at Elaine's feet.

"I suppose you're going to let her go to school in those?"

"She's gone in worse. And not here in Toronto, either."

"She's getting new shoes right now."

"She's getting nothing from you. We don't need you!"

"Katherine, I won't have my daughter going around like a street pauper."

Katherine's sharp look of indistinct objection: Ernie had caught her off guard.

"She's just back. I'll get her shoes before school starts. Why didn't you get her shoes when she was in Colme?"

"We'll go right now and while I'm at it I might as well get them new school clothes. The whole works. Comeon' you two."

"You'll not buy them *anything*. We can manage on our own. Why don't you just leave?"

Katherine glared across the kitchen and tossed the tea towel to the counter as Elaine left the room. Ford watched. Ernie sat down, putting his hand to his chin. He stared back at her.

"You're so goddam proud you can't let the kids' own father buy them clothes? You think you're so goddam righteous you can afford not to have help? Eh? Who the hell do you think you are?"

Ford watched, fascinated.

Katherine would not speak. She walked out of the kitchen into the small living room and sat down next to the window to stare out onto the street below. Her fingers caressed one of the leaves of the potted plant which sat on the ledge. She could see Ernie's bright red Chrysler in the drive. Finally she crossed her hands on her lap, a habit Ford also had. Ernie came in. Her mind throbbed, remembering:

*You're not the first who ever burst, Kathy
You're not the first who ever burst
You're not the first . . . Kathy*

"Katherine, for Christ's sake, all I want to do is help. What the hell do you think you're doing anyway? Goddamit, if I wanted to I could take the kids from you tomorrow."

No answer.

*They're laughing at us Ernie
Ernie the rapist
Ernie the cradle-humper*

Ernie walked into Elaine's bedroom. There was muffled talking, walking in the kitchen, movement toward the door.

*her arms to her head denying, denying
her arms to his face, denying, denying*

Katherine sprang up.

"You'll not take them!" she cried, her voice low and threatening, her hands grabbing at Ford who was nearest her.

"They're coming with me, Katherine."

Elaine was part way down the stairs. Ford stood still, his mother's hands clamped on his shoulders.

"Elaine, come back up here," Katherine said firmly.

"Katherine, they're free to come with me. I'll bring them back in a few hours."

"No-o-o !"

She pushed past her husband and had Elaine by the arm. Elaine did not resist. Ernie grabbed his wife by the waist and swung her around on the stairwell until her face was inches from his own. Elaine backed up against the wall. Ernie backed up against the wall. He talked quickly, his voice deep, angry.

"Katherine, Kathy don't defy me!" he yelled, his voice rising.

She thrust him away and he lost his footing and stumbled, his face crashing against the wall. He caught his balance by falling to his hands and knees, but the equilibrium lasted only for a few seconds before he

felt himself going down. He grabbed at Katherine's legs to hold himself up, to pull himself up. She beat him on the sides of his head with her fists. Ernie let go and crashed again against the wall. When he looked up his face was wet and blood-smeared. He fumbled in his pocket and then held a blue handkerchief to his nose while leaning clumsily against the wall. Slowly he pushed himself to his feet. Katherine stared down at him. Ford watched from the top of the stairs. The German landlord and his friends had opened the front door and gawked. Ernie looked down at them, then back up at his wife. Elaine was leaning against the wall opposite her father, her eyes wide. Ernie plunged his hand into his breast pocket and pulled out his wallet.

He dug into it frantically and flung a clump of paper money at his wife. The movement was too rapid for her to avoid and the money struck her in the face; and then scattered along the staircase. Elaine reached for some bills near her.

"Leave it!" Katherine screamed.

Ernie looked back at his wife and saw her eyes watering, her hands going to her face. Elaine let the bills fall to the stair beneath her. Ford squatted at the top of the stairs, watching. They all heard the Chrysler start up and drive away: a squeal of tires.

Ford was transfixed by a blue five dollar bill flitting in the breeze on the steps below him.

"It'll blow away," he appealed to his mother who stood beside him equally immobile.

"Leave it!" she screamed again.

Her voice was shrill, final, terrifying. They did not look at each other, only at the money. Bills were caught by the breeze coming through the open door.

"But Mother, it's money. It's money!" Elaine cried.

Katherine was fixed, defiant. Ford's mind was tight and exploding. He remembered her so arbitrary, his eyes filling with the images that had stayed long after:

"Why? Why?" the children had pleaded, clinging to her desperately in the yard behind their house in Colme. The hoe moved up and down with deadly regularity pushing into the tub water first one little kitten and then another. Their pathetic whines dulling into miniscule myriad bubbles gurgling lightly at the water's surface, little paws moving almost leisurely, pushing against the iron weight, helplessly, their eyes still closed.

"Get OUT!" Katherine screamed at them.

They started to walk away, obeying the same force that was killing their kittens.

"We found them. They're ours."

But pacing wretchedly away and turning suddenly to stay the executions yet another minute, wishing, wishing, wishing to God they hadn't reported the discovery to her.

"Please mommy, just let us keep one! *Please!*"

Katherine had turned on them, eyes cold and grey, cheeks twisted in anger.

"We can't keep them. I won't tell you again, *get OUT!*"

And they ran, Ford faster, crying groans deep from their insides,

wanting to smash at a wall or to tear at her apron, to rage against the injustice. And finding no reason for the deaths, Ford picked up a large stone and walked back toward her. He pleaded with her again. He saw a kitten, its tiny mouth open and frothing, the hoe like a grave stone closing over it, drowning it.

He flung the stone at her: the click as it struck her head and the hoe dropped. She fastened both hands to the spot.

"You damned bastard!" he screamed at her. He was coming toward her with another rock, moving slowly up to the tub, she stepping back, unbelieving. The same little kitten was pawing at the air, its head bobbing irregularly. When he got to the tub Ford saw the other three, silent and bloated, their shiny wet bellies barren islands in the clear water.

"Get away!" he threatened as she made a lunge for him.

The rock struck her forehead, a hollow thud; she sank to her knees, a whimpering rising from her. He saw the fire in her eyes.

Now, the same violent glare on the steps to their apartment, the same fierce challenge to whomever might defy her in her rage. The two were locked on the stairs: he looked up into her eyes, her brow corrugated, tense lesions there, her eyes on his and the weight of time passing, of the breeze juggling some of the bills around the entrance to the door, the contest of authority burning at them both.

"Go inside, both of you," she commanded suddenly.

Ford rose slowly. Elaine walked up the stairs, stopping in the kitchen to look back, watching as her mother bent down and gathered up the first bill.

She touched it at the top, moved it lengthwise through her fingers, picked up a second, then meticulously gathered up all of them, all down the stairs. She closed the bottom door and stood there a moment holding the bundle of notes firmly in her right hand. She came back up to the kitchen ignoring her children. Ford looked on sad and silent. Katherine went to the gas stove, hesitated, and then turned on a front burner. She held the bundle of money above the flames. Elaine was standing closeby the stove as well, her burning eyes fixed intently on the money, the round blue flames. An unnatural smile hovered over Katherine's pallid face. The fire blazed up and caught a few outer bills, little blue and green lips of flame caressing the length of the money, creeping underneath, around, beside, suddenly lapping at the flat surfaces. Then the whole bundle flared, the flames racing up to Katherine's very fingers and palm. She didn't seem to notice or to fear. Then in a jerk, almost dance-like, she flung the flaming bundle into the sink, some of the bills flying asunder landing on the floor. They burned in a bright, happy flame. Katherine bent down to pick up the fallen bills and carefully placed them in the fire. She watched the flames poking and flickering against the shiny paint of the wallboard. Slowly the money turned to charred, curled fragments. And all through the burning Ford and Elaine dared not move. They trembled to see their mother so intoxicated and entranced by the flaming money in front of her.

As rapid as had been the quick shot of flame at the start, so too the quick absence of flame. A single wisp of smoke, a thin, tiny wiggle disappearing quickly into the air. . .

Katherine stared into the white space of the sink for a long time.

Finally she turned the taps on until the splattering and spray were everywhere. The stream of water dissolved and disintegrated the charred paper carrying most of it in little black whirlpools down the drain. She turned the taps off, then walked slowly to her bedroom as if exhausted. Ford and Elaine could hear her sobs. They looked at each other fleetingly. Ford went to the sink and retrieved a tattered triangle of green paper no larger than his thumb and forefinger. He took the piece of bill to his room and set it out on the desk to dry.

Violence is also a creative urge. From the Canadian one-dollar bill six inches by two and three-quarters there had emerged a rather different object. Charred and mangled by the flames of Katherine's anger, tiny spots of green, though, untouched somehow by the fire, like moss on a dark basalt chip, firm not flaky to the touch such as burned newsprint might be. Ford mounted it in his scrapbook with the rhinoceros on the cover, dots of glue dabbed on the underside. He outlined its triangular shape in red pencil making a border; then made another border in blue, and still another in black.

Dad's \$1.00 bill burned by Mom, August 30, 1957.

He put it in his scrapbook not knowing exactly why he was doing it. To show his father later on, he decided; to show him how foolish this mother was, to show his father that he was no ally in the deed. He would keep the page hidden.

But not from his friends: Nort, Bunky, Woody. They crowded around him at his little desk and examined the small green piece of paper glued to the scrapbook page. They shrank back from the mother who had burned it and others like it. They searched the stairs for overlooked bills on their way out.

Katherine acknowledged nothing. She continued her routine. A day passed, a week, a month; the incident faded except that from time to time Ford looked at the green triangle and always remembered the intoxicated and witchlike delight in his mother's face.

She maintained a similar silence about her husband and he too faded from their daily life. Those days Katherine routinized by neces-

sity for it became her intention to create a security of money and emotion for her children and herself; always she yearned for some vague finality of purpose. She often thought about the money she had burned knowing that in its destruction she had purged herself of an overwhelming impulse to annihilate her past. She had felt unburdened, her tensions lifted away. But Katherine was also aware of the danger in yielding to such gusts of hate and passion. When greatly provoked she knew she could not control herself.

To avoid the crises she shut out the causes. At one time she had found herself defending Ernie directly, patching up reports of his activities, moulding her accounts to fit her listeners. It vexed her spirit to adjust her answers for them; it devastated her when she realized that the adjustments were for herself as well. There were events which slapped her into that realization: Ernie days overdue from a business trip, Ernie short on money for no apparent reason, Ernie cold and distant after long silences between them.

Before she found out about the Anderson girl, Katherine endured a feeling of helpless lagging momentum, swept along by her circumstance, unable to arrest the flow of activity: Ernie come, Ernie go, new deals, old deals, sales reports, bad days, good days, quota lists, business ideas, qualified referral leads . . . She spoke to him about her ennui:

"Ernie, why can't we go away somewhere and catch our breath?"

"Where?"

"Ernie you make so much money, but we don't seem to be going anywhere."

"Where do you want to go?"

Until she began to question the details of his business activities: the cash flow of his business, the real profitability of his ventures.

"Leave the bacon to me," he told her, "and you keep the stove hot."

Mrs. Kincaid said she could not understand why Katherine would not participate in the Catholic Women's League. Katherine finally agreed to chair a committee to plan the Colme Church's centennial celebrations. She competently arranged the expected programme: bakes, bazaars, socials, canvass campaigns for the building fund. Mrs. Kincaid chattered at committee meetings, her voice ragged and insistent. But when Katherine tried to arrange a debate between Jack Ozart, the pastor at the Colme Pentecostal Assembly, and Father Moss, pastor at St. Patrick's up in Formosa, Father Sumpster intervened.

"Not in keeping with the spirit of the centennial celebrations, wouldn't you say Mrs. Giffen?"

"But it is, Father Sumpster! Father Moss is an excellent debater."

"Well, perhaps he is, but I'm a bit concerned that Mr. Ozart might take advantage of the occasion to, well, you know, preach fundamentally. To bible thump; it might get out of hand. You understand, Katherine?"

"You're a bumptious hypocrite," she called after him as he escaped out the front door. Mrs. Kincaid stayed a minute longer, long enough to suggest that Katherine needed a rest, that she was far too worked up to think clearly when really it was an obvious and reasonable precaution to take.

Katherine's growing dissatisfaction and malaise persisted, while three weeks out of four Ernie scoured the county roads of fifteen townships as a self-employed commercial traveller for *Ralston-Purina* fol-

lowing up leads like a beagle. Early in their marriage she had been buoyant with optimism and her inchoate support encouraged him through the fluctuations and disappointments of his business dealings. She prepared steaks when sales were good, casseroles when they weren't. As months passed Katherine slowly came to understand that no line of products seemed to endure, no territory was safe from being 'loaded' or 'hostile'; every period of energy had to be followed by a period of lethargy until some new scheme or new angle popped Ernie back to life, warm excitement hustling through their days until everything settled back into the inevitable clomp; always the open-endedness. Nothing could be permatized in their lives.

Katherine was relieved that there were no mortgage or rent payments eroding her husband's tenuous income, an income that moved off early in a quarter with festive blaze, positively orgiastic in its ascent, a whimper in its eventual and recurrent declines.

Ernie followed the autumn fairs. He came home bristling with leads, sales, new franchises, ideas, plans. Autumn was always hectic and promising. By Christmas the excitement would be gone.

Collectively, though, these variables had never pointed to bankruptcy or catastrophe; they did point to an eventual exasperation for Katherine. The strain of the open-endedness. The vague and gnawing expectation of change in the face of the most unrelenting changelessness. The torment of their being nothing special eroded her participation in Ernie's fluctuating moods and attitudes toward his work and his family.

There were no special days for Ernie. Christmas, New Year's, Easter, birthdays: they were all days in a life, days in a nuisance

continuum, days to get through, days to avoid sometimes. For Ernie, any celebrations or festivals had to be endured and had value only as distractions. Ultimately they became obligations foisted on him by others. He would prefer not to participate. By rushing through his experience he did not have to suffer the loneliness and emptiness he knew were there: glimpses of that void alone in his car between towns, between calls, in weary repetetive miles.

His livelihood affected the children; Ford far more than Elaine. Ford knew how best to please his itinerant salesman father. He found an ad in one of his dad's trade journals, wrote to Miami Yak Plastics Ltd., Fort Lauderdale, and received the exclusive dealership for chalk holders for southwestern Ontario: in exchange for fifty dollars cash, American, and a minimum quarterly order of six dozen or more. Ford canvassed every teacher in Colme and found four who were allergic to chalk dust. All four purchased one dozen each of variously coloured holders. Ford's father put the rest in *Harris' Stationary Store* on consignment.

"You gotta have a product that turns over fast and gets you back a big mark-up. You simply gotta beat your overhead to the end of the month. The hooker is time."

Ford agreed.

"But chalk holders? Not enough action there, son. Market's too small. Not bad for a kid ten though ."

After a fashion, Ford handled Colme's teachers, businessmen and radio announcers for his father. Just before the rapid relocation to Toronto Ford was beginning to get accustomed to promoting products a-

round town. His peers could neither conceive of nor imitate his activities. They thought Ford odd. His father might be covering southwestern Ontario peddling *Atlas Juice Extractors* and Ford would take a bundle of flyers to the post office and have them dropped into every mail box. His father would follow up any leads and pay Ford a small commission.

"Teachers are always loaded with dough and those guys at the radio station have got even more than that," his father said when he got back one weekend from a franchise-hunt to Detroit.

"What's it?" Ford asked, examining the strange machine his father was sitting on.

"I know," Elaine offered. "It's an exercise bike!"

Which it was and subsequently proved to be one of Ernie's best blitz items. Huron County biceps bulged and bugled for months afterward. The family prospered economically. Katherine got a new *Frigidaire* and the family got a new twenty-one inch *Admiral* television.

Once Ernie pressed his wife to canvass her friends to sell automatic knitting machines.

"Fifty-four stitches in one stroke!"

She agreed to try but detested her motive in gathering friends into the living room to sell them a machine even she found repulsive. There were ooh-ahh inquiries and demonstrations by the dozen. Mrs. Kincaid almost bought one; but Katherine undermined the sale by pointing out the limitations of pattern and design that the machine imposed. She tried to explain to Ernie. He teased her about being too theoretical, not practical, not plugged into the facts of life.

"Let's face it babes; you wear your heart on your sleeve."

She believed him and saw his mobility, the flow and flux of people he met and knew, the range of his travels and experience, as remote from her own experience, as divorced from the spectrum of possibility for her own life. He was not exotic to her. Rather, he was from a world of energy and affairs, appointments and deadlines: all of which seemed odd and intimidating to her; destructive at the same time as they flashed at her enticingly.

Ernie Giffen darted through life in shirts and ties that caught customers' attention. His voice scooted the scales in tone and pitch as the content demanded. He might speak in sips or gouge great gaps into conversations at will. He was pressuring and reassuring within a single sentence. She felt awkward beside him.

He had met her in the evening while selling her a set of three-ply 18.8 stainless steel chromium plated cookware. While her father sat like a saintly corpse nearby, Katherine signed for the dutch oven, the six quart pan, the four quart pan, the large frying pan, the small frying pan, the egg poacher which doubled as a baby bottle warmer. She watched Ernie fold her pay cheque from *Ackert's Hardware* into his wallet and close up his sample kits.

"But you've forgotten your quarter," she had said to him politely. He used the quarter in a demonstration of the three-ply cookware's 'amazing versatility', pressing a lighted cigarette to a kleenex whose surface was stretched tightly over the face of the quarter.

"See how the quarter gets hot and the kleenex won't burn?"

The quarter was hot; the kleenex did not burn. Even though he

puffed at the cigarette until its end was glowing red.

"In just this same way you can be sure that the heat from the element will be distributed evenly in the pot; no hot spots, no burnt food. It's the special inner core that does it."

He looked into her face; his eyes were warm and friendly.

"Keep the quarter; a souvenir."

Three weeks later the cookware came. She found the little note he had included:

*Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
You've bought my pots,
How 'bout a date too?*

Ernie

It amused her.

He came back gushing. And left gushing at the end of the date which she had agreed to only after he pressured her. She got caught by the rush and the excitement he brought with him always. He brought her home at midnight, asked to kiss her, and left. He waited a week and sent her a postcard from Tobermory at the top end of the Bruce Peninsula.

*Just on my way over to Manitoulin.
Thinking of you on Georgian Bay*

love, Ernie

He came gushing again. She arranged for Mrs. Kincaid to come in and sit with her father. Then Ernie took her dancing at the *Royal T* in Tavistock. She drank the warm, thick-tasting rye and cokes reluctantly at first, then less cautiously. She was quiet and embarrassed at tables with Ernie's fast-paced friends. She released herself to his arms on the dance floor, trusting him to hold her steady. She let the liquor

tighten her temples and pump her blood in great whooshes. Katherine leaned against him in the car feeling bold, flushed, relaxed, as he drove back toward Colme.

He stopped a few miles up the River Road in the overgrown front yard of Surlin Kincaid's abandoned farm house, *CKNX* country music jumping quietly on the radio. Ernie poured more rye into paper cups and they drank slowly. There were only the sounds of their own movements on the seat of the car. She craved, allowed his caresses, encouraged them; was tepid, clung to him, and brushed soft, wet lips against his neck and ears. He placed her palm on his lap and she felt him hard and foreign there. He pressed her down gently against the seat, his hand holding her at the small of her back. She could feel him through their clothes against her thigh. And forcing a momentum to her kisses, to her breathing, the new and growing movements in her legs and belly, she pulled him to herself. Even as his hands moved awkwardly and distractingly under her dress she forced the passion; it would not come on its own. She was too alert to his hands, his closed eyes, his hips revolving, undulating at her. There were her quiet tears too; and the night sky she could see through the window slanted above her. She thought of her father and of how his father's land had once stretched to almost where they now were, of how Surlin Kincaid's ancestors must have sat on the grass on Sunday afternoons right where she and Ernie were now making love.

There came postcards from Goderich, Sarnia, Windsor, Owen Sound, Collingwood, London. She traced his itinerary on an *Esso* map. At *Ackert's* she found everyone pleasant, happy, beaming. Her days became warm and hopeful. Her father seemed more lively and the enormous impos-

itions of his illness seemed less oppressive to her. When Ernie came home they scoured the banks of the Maitland River for flowers and private places. "Weeds are just flowers people don't collect," she told Ernie.

They drove to Grand Bend. He cupped her breasts in his hands while they stood letting the waves from Lake Huron crash over them. On the beach they smiled in their secret knowledge. They drove back home full of the warmth of their time together. At Sauble Beach on other outings they drank daughts with the Indians at the Hepworth Hotel. They drove to Tobermory and back in a day and spoke of a place by the sea where they might live and make love. They walked through the wide empty field which sprawled between the River Road and Gorrie Lane near her home. But always they came back at night to her father.

Mrs. Kincaid stayed with Katherine's father during the day while they were on their trips. He never slept until she was home. His dark eyes would look out at her when she came to kiss him. They were pleading, cautious eyes, but Katherine could tell that he approved somehow of her new directions and actions; she had been home, alone usually, for too long. She stared back into his eyes and knew her father felt the nearness of death. She sensed his fear and his loneliness but made no excuse for the sudden and frequent absences; and he made no demands. She wanted to give him some of her youth.

In August she heard from a friend that Ernie had been in Listowell, a small town twenty miles away, at a dance with another woman on a Friday night that he might have been with her. The report said that Ernie had fondled the woman at his table and had danced wantonly with her

around the floor. When Katherine confronted him with it the following week on his return, there were no lies. But there were no apologies. Ernie would not let her make it important.

"If we're to marry," he said, "and be happy with each other in the common run of things, day to day, we'll need to be sure about it. That's all."

He held her to him and curled her dark brown hair in his finger, assuring her with his strong arms. He kissed her eyelids lightly and spoke positively about their life together.

In September he came unexpectedly on a Thursday evening. Behind the house, not thirty yards, the Maitland River flowed by, burgeoning and swelling in spring, wandering with a seeming rootless freedom, effortless and strong in summer and autumn; quiet and white in winter. Katherine's father had placed three ponderous oak lawn chairs that he had built himself under an ancient maple which grew precariously on a promontory jutting out over the river. The Maitland flowed west at that point, swinging in its course around a sharp bend just upstream from the yard so that the deepest and fastest water rushed past in spring immediately below the headland of grass and rock that formed their perch, the river undermining it year by year. Nevertheless, the old maple was a strong sentinel against the sun and wind from the west and though it leaned slightly, and threatened each spring run off to tumble into the river, it grew longer and leafier each year. A coppice of poplars and lilac bushes clambered around the proud tree. There was a well-worn path from the house to the chairs. She and her father had gone there often to watch the river, to watch the sunsets.

Ernie and Katherine sat in the lawn chairs as she and her father had often done. The river hushed by behind them, wishing them to a certain calmness, the grass grey-green, tussocky, gentle, around them, a peculiar condition of suspense between them. They watched the moon, picked out stars: *Borealis*, *Serpens*, listened to the cricket hum. He watched her walk to the garden near the house, watched her touch the tousled bushes of flowers there. There was suspense, but there was also peace. She returned, offering him a feather she had found on the ground near the flowers. Then they walked to the very edge of the promontory. The river was there, perhaps six feet below, moving quietly, lazily, dark and sullen. He took her right hand suddenly, startling her, and slipped a diamond ring on her finger. But in doing so he pinched the skin at her knuckle and she cried out slightly.

She went in to her father's bedroom after Ernie had gone and showed him the ring. He took the hand in his, nodded slowly; his eyes watered. He leaned back to rest still holding her hand. She sat there a long time watching him sleep. He surprised her by speaking:

"He is very fast for you, Kathy."

Ernie laughed when she explained to him that he must take religious instruction if they were to marry. When he attended the classes, on six consecutive Sunday evenings, she was delighted and greatly eased. Father Sumpster had Ernie sign the pledge to raise any children they might have as Catholics, and to send them to Catholic schools. Father Sumpster filed the paper away in his desk. On the way out of the rectory Katherine kissed Ernie on the cheek.

They married. Immediately after the ceremony the wedding party

drove to the River Road to visit her father. He smiled, cried, allowed pictures to be taken; sat uncomfortably in his bed.

The reception swaggered and fussed itself far into the night at the *Blue Barn* in Palmerston. The liquor and talk flowed freely.

"Good Christ, Ern, she's a child bride."

"I'm twenty-four, thank you," Katherine replied, laughing.

"Yeah, but Ern's pushing a hundred and ten!"

"Hey Ern," someone yelled across the tables, "figure you can keep it up now you're married?"

"Keep what up?" Ernie laughed, and everyone laughed too.

Darby, Ernie's brother from Lindsay, introduced Katherine to his wife and invited her and her new husband to visit anytime.

"We've got a cottage by the lake," he said.

Katherine's sister-in-law, Paula, cried a great deal as she helped Katherine into her going-away clothes.

"It'll be all right; it'll be all right," she said.

The band quit at two. Katherine tossed a garter from the stage. Someone appeared with a record player and the Giffens played on. Finally at three-thirty in the morning, Ernie galloped to his wife, picked her up, and with a dash disappeared out the door. People followed, laughing, clapping, singing, while Ernie's car roared off down the highway into the dark.

Their honeymoon was short, intense. They took a cottage at Wasaga Beach for a weekend but while there Katherine became anxious about her father; and when the Chrysler finally pulled up at their home she hurried in to greet him. They were to live there indefinitely.

Prior to the wedding Ernie had moved his stock, filing cabinet, and even his business telephone to the house. It was to be his new base of operations. The house was the first of four built by Katherine's grandfather along the River Road. His farm had included the land one-half mile east along the river and south to Gorrie Lane. He had slowly sold off the parcel during World War I and in the late 1920's began to subdivide the river front land; but never got beyond the Depression or the fourth building. Surlin Kincaid, whose farm had bordered Katherine's grandfather's on the east, bought the second of the four houses to retire to. As she explained the history to him Ernie smiled approvingly; for Katherine everything seemed exciting and quick. Ernie had penetrated right into the heart of her life, past and present.

The next morning after their return he was gone to London on business. On the same Monday she sat and helped her father eat as she had always done late in the afternoon. His toothless mouth closed over the spoon and left it clean. She thought of how she was now free of *Ackert's Hardware*.

Four years earlier she had decided quickly to wait out her father's death.

"Two years maximum," Dr. Hastings Jarry had said.

She waited patiently those years as her father moved in and out of the Colme hospital, as his debentures and savings, remnants of his own father's estate, were depleted by costly operations and specialists' fees. And suddenly, Ernie. With only a federal pension and a small dividend from one remaining debenture to sustain them, Katherine had to find a job. Her income from *Ackert's* created a careful equilibrium in their affairs,

but ticking at her days was the rub: it all pointed toward the time of her father's death. With death would come a vague emancipation, with death would come change. In four years she had become accustomed to the rigour of non-change for the sake of a cautious permanence. She did not resent her father as a burden; she merely delayed, waited, but discovered repeatedly that she had no vision of what to wait for. With Ernie, though, came new energy, and a new boldness sometimes deliberate, sometimes careless.

In January she began a correspondence course from the University of Western Ontario: *Modern European History, 1750 to the Present*. She worked busily at her reading, her essays, and worked as enthusiastically at redecorating their house for the new life in it. She made her own curtains and drapes; papered, painted, recovered furniture, bought a new posturepedic mattress for their bed. Ernie smiled and approved of her industry, but he did not feel the new birth she felt. He did not feel life any differently.

When he was away and she was alone at night, her father sleeping uneasily in the front bedroom, it seemed to her that nothing had actually altered at all even though changes in her world were everywhere. As usual she took her father his pills and his liquid medicines at nine o'clock. As usual she read by the window until her eyes were heavy. But on Friday nights of Ernie's out-of-town weeks her resigned pace would change. She scampered about the house getting a large meal prepared; yet, even as she prepared it she expected the whole idea of her having a husband to pop like a soap bubble: a nasty illusion bound to explode if it were to touch anything solid. She put on a clean dress and

combed out her hair. When he drove up the laneway she would be on the verandah:

"What's new babes?" he would call to her from the car, leaning into the back seat to pull out his briefcase.

A few hours later he was often sound asleep on the living room couch, collapsed from a week's driving, a week's talking, a week's play, a big meal partly eaten.

A year later Elaine was born. Katherine had been very ill during the pregnancy and the combined pressures of her father and the child undermined her health. Ernie could not stay home for long periods of time and finally he decided to put the father into a nursing home in Clinton. Katherine protested vigorously but her husband was determined that the old man was a breaking burden for her. They moved him by ambulance on a Saturday afternoon. It was three weeks before Katherine could get down to visit.

Elaine was healthy and grew quickly. Katherine carried her into the back yard on spring and summer nights. In late March and early April the river would surge past, a spate of debris from farm and forest in a mild maelstrom of raw energy, on and on toward the lake, swelling against the south bank under the promontory, inundating it slowly and surely, swashing on a broad surface, brown and grey with its load. In spring the river seemed impetuous and vehement, far, far louder than at any other time, ice chunks dangling and bouncing past. In summer, though, with Elaine snugly against her bosom, Katherine felt nourished and consoled by the water: mother and daughter with their fantasies. She had watched the bank slowly dissolve into the changing river for many years

and now she began to feel as if she were slowly dissolving into a life that flowed and carried her with it against her will. In summer she had swum in the water farther upstream. In winter she skated on its bumpy surface, working with the neighbour kids to grind off the stubborn snow.

She stared into the baby's face one summer night and was aware of how much the passing river must see over the years: mothers, daughters, fathers, husbands, widows. Change, death and change.

"What do you see little lady?"

She saw Ernie's wide-eyed glare there. Her tiny blue eyes seemed to lock onto specific stars. Katherine looked up searching for Elaine's stars and instead saw the maple branches silhouetted against the night. Sometimes the moon was pierced with dark rivers and seas.

Under the maple in the yard the little baby's eyes caught every movement and every sound. Without words she was asking what was around her. And always, the river in summer was silent. Katherine and Elaine developed a quiet language together under their tree waiting for Ernie. In the early summer the lilacs would be blooming nearby; and so surely at night when the scent laced all the air of the yard. Katherine sat on the old wooden lawn chair and as sudden as a mosquito sting the sense of herself: as woman, as mother, as daughter, as wife -- all at once. The expectations from her father, her husband, her daughter, caught in the expectations, and not rejecting any of them. Content with the baby nestled against her breast, content with the old man who waited for her visits, content with the husband who came home to her. She counted the

days in a year that she saw Ernie and she recognized her way of waiting, her way of anticipating changes she could not visualize. She felt the open-endedness, the inconclusiveness of her life and she yearned for a finality.

She had thought that Elaine would bring a finality, life yearning for itself through her and Ernie. But now that the child was out of her body she felt detached from it. Even when it suckled her breast it seemed a separate, however dependent being. Watching its features form, its miniscule personality grow in slivers and then in giant leaps, she began to understand the impersonality of all people. When Ernie played with Elaine in her crib it did not please Katherine; it did not suggest to her that here was the warmth and love of father for child. It was part of the open-endedness. Ernie's finger poked at Elaine's tiny belly:

"Gootchie,"

Elaine clicking and wiggling with delight,

"Gootchie,"

Katherine feeling angered, almost nauseous,

"Gootchie."

15

"What'll I be after my death? Clearly and precisely!" Skip Penbenny asked Ford who was now proving a more responsive listener.

"Everything. And nothing."

"Crap! For an answer you give me a contradiction. That's an old trick."

"To answer transcendent questions in language made for immanent knowledge is bound to lead to contradictions."

"Eh?"

"Schopenhauer."

"Have a drink," Skip replied.

Ford drank.

"Immanent knowledge?" Skip asked.

Ford sank back in the bus seat. He looked across to his companion.

"Immanent knowledge is immanent, at hand, right here," he said.

"What are you? Some kind of empiricist?"

"At best I'm a Spiritualist."

"Then I'm a Materialist," Skip chuckled.

"Hmn?"

"I see matter, through its form and composition, as producing everything that I determine to be thought and will in man. Have a snort?"

Ford declined.

"I'd rather talk about sex," Ford said. "So you know Schopenhauer too I see."

"The popular writings."

"Sex is more interesting to talk about," Ford said.

"Ah yes," Skip began automatically; "your cock is subject far more than any other external body member almost entirely to the will and not at all to knowledge. Take the ear, for example; it hears whether it wants to or not. Go on, cover your ears. The sound gets through your hands. In like manner you get a hard-on and that's it!"

"I don't follow."

"Ideas won't give you an erection. A rod is a reflex action, merely in the form of stimulus and therefore directly and only so long as women or substitutes are present: it ain't the idea of children which stimulates; no, it's the women. Their presence must act in the form of direct stimulus."

"What's the point?"

"Simply that the effect which an idea has on your cock cannot like that of motivation which usually comes from an idea be annulled by another idea except in so far as the second idea suppresses consciousness of the first so that the first is no longer present: but in that event the effect is unfailingly annulled, even when the second idea contains nothing contrary to the first, which is what is required of a counter-motivation."

"Really?" Ford answered, not really understanding. "So what?"

"It's a very important consideration. Want another drink?"

Ford declined.

"Change the subject?" Skip asked.

Ford agreed.

"You a Christian?" Skip asked.

"I don't know," Ford answered.

"Pagan?"

"I don't know."

"If you're a pagan you must be aetheist, pantheist, Buddhist, or communist."

"Pantheist?"

"As popular metaphysics it's a very trivial business. No really distinct dogmas, no categorical ethic, no real moral tendency. No sacred scriptures."

"Who wants to be moral?"

"My boy, if it ain't moral, it ain't religious. Damn pantheism hardly deserves to be called a religion. Stupid play of fantasy, personification of natural forces, childish, primitive."

"What's your chief objection to Pantheism?"

"My chief objection to Pantheism is that it signifies nothing. To call the world God is not to explain it but merely to enrich the language with a superfluous synonym for the word world. It comes to the same thing whether you say 'the world is God' or 'the world is the world' ."

"Why?"

"Pantheism presupposes the pre-existence of theism: because only by starting from a God, that is to say by already having one and being familiar with him, can you finally come to identify him with the world, actually in order to politely set him aside."

"Remarkable," Ford said.

"No, Schopenhauer," Skip replied.

"I think I'm pagan. In the Greek sense," Ford added.

"Then you're a fool. But I do admit that you can glimpse an allegorical representation of the highest ontological and cosmological principles there. *Uranus*, he's space, the first condition for all existence. He's bigdaydaddy. ;*Cronus*, he's time. He castrates the procreative principle: time annihilates all generative power; or more precisely, the capacity for generating new forms, the primary generation of living races. But then there's *Zeus*, he's matter. *Zeus* gets away from the power of time which kills everything else. From matter all things proceed. Be a Zeusist if you want to be anything."

"Then I'm a Zeusist."

"Shh! That lady with the kid heard you."

The plump woman whose little girl had been eating potato chips earlier looked furtively across at the two chattering men.

"Then I'll be a Jew!" Ford whispered loudly.

"Rude dogma, son, rude dogma."

"Why so?"

"Christians allegorized 'em already."

"How?"

"The masses are stupid. So you give them a beautiful allegory; pabulum parables: love your enemy, resign yourself to the fuck-ups, deny your balls. Christian bosses give the masses a complete guide to practical living designed to lead to the celestial city along the straight and narrow path of light and taxes. An anchor of consolation and hope."

"Let's talk about sex again," Ford snickered.

"No, let's talk about women!"

"You a misogynist?"

"No, a pragmatist."

"I like women."

"I do too, but as long as they understand what they are. Women are not intended for great mental or for great physical labour says ol' Schopenhauer and I agree with him. He says they expiate the guilt of life not through activity but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, caring for the child and subjection to the man, to whom they should be patient and cheering companions. Great suffering, great joy, exertion, are not for them; their lives should flow by more quietly, trivially, gently, than the man's without being essentially happier or unhappier."

"You're a chauvinist."

"I'm a pragmatist. Listen, friend, you should read that Schopenhauer of yours more closely. Those women are decked out like blossoms. Isn't that right? Charming, soft, succulent, sighing, sipping the air like blossoms; they're gorgeous for a few years at the expense of the whole remainder of their lives. Seems they've got to catch us fast so we'll support them somehow for the rest of our lives. Ever seen a woman's guts who's had some kids; say two or three? Stretch marks up and down her belly, tits all pocked and lined. Who'd want them then? They go to extremes to get us early."

"You're not really serious I hope. I mean, you can't make blanket statements like that . . ."

"I can. I did. And if you're really honest with yourself you'll see that I'm right ultimately."

"Bullshit," Ford said loudly.

Skip handed his companion the Seagram's bottle. Ford declined again. The little girl stared across at them. Her mother poked at her.

"Women are soft," Skip announced.

"They are soft," Ford said, not wanting to argue the point.

"They display more pity, and consequently more philanthropy and sympathy with the unfortunate than men do; on the other hand, they are inferior to men in respect of justice. In fact, if I had to sum it up point blank I'd say that the fundamental defect of the female character is a lack of a sense of justice. They're bloody cunning, they are. More than strong, they're cunning."

"You're a little hard," Ford suggested.

"Nonsense! Get down to it, friend. They exist solely for the propagation of the race. That's it! Their entire vocation. They are altogether more involved with the species than with individuals."

"That's nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense. And to top it, they're goddam cats when together."

"Catty," Ford said.

"Catty. Right. Men are indifferent to one another. Women? By nature, they're enemies."

"Enemies."

"Because they're all after the same thing. Behind every successful man there stands a woman. Correction. There lies a woman. He needs the distraction. Behind every successful man there's a good lay. Or several good lays. Okay?"

"A good lay, heh, heh."

"Shh! I think she heard us again," Skip cautioned.

"But women are eminently very desirable. I like their hips. The way it all folds up so neatly."

"You call that something to like? Narrow-shouldered, stunted, broad-hipped, short-legged, sagging paps? Goddam verrucose veins? Who needs it? And look at their stupid eyebrows! Eh? Men make millions making make-up for women so they'll be attractive to the men and the men can end up making them. Right?"

"You don't like women," Ford said calmly.

"It's crazy I tell you. Go ahead; get married. You half your rights and double your duties. Christ, no wonder prostitutes make so much money. A man's got to get some relief from twice the work and half the fun."

"You need lots of women."

"Goddam right," Skip cried, pushing his knees against the seat in front of him.

"A dozen at least?" Ford asked.

"It's all biology," Skip said. "The shame for the husband in getting himself cuckolded has a lot to do with distancing our experience from the basic biological hunt for fuckable mates. Once it was fuck who fuck can. When and how it didn't matter. Whom, it didn't matter. We formalized all that and proliferated the social niceties and intrigues which were designed to accomodate an ordering of biological drives and competition for mates."

"Does love fit in anywhere?"

"That's spiritual. Let's face it; what's a cock between friends?"

"Me, I figure monogamy has its values," Ford said.

"You telling me you'd be monogamous?"

"Sure."

"You're a goddam liar!" Skip answered so loudly that several people in surrounding seats turned around to look at them.

"We all live in polygamy," Skip continued. "Every one of us. Every man needs many women and we all run around saying it isn't so. If we got back to basics with the guys supporting as many women as they could this would mean the restoration of woman to her rightful and natural position, the subordinate one. And then the world'd be full of *women* and there wouldn't be any more unhappy broads sitting like Royal Dalton China in suburban bungalows, not good for a goddam thing except to look at and fuck once in a while. People just simply make too much out of sex. And all for the sake of order and because they're scared shitless of breaking some moral code that's got nothing at all to do with reality."

"I don't believe you at all."

"It's all very complicated, I admit."

The man in the seat in front of them turned around slightly.

"Makes me depressed," Ford said.

"Don't get depressed."

"Why?"

"Makes you want to commit suicide."

"Never would," Ford said.

"Never know," Skip countered.

"As far as I can see, it is only the monotheistic, that is to say Jewish religions whose members regard self-destruction as a crime."

"Suicide's cowardly," Skip said.

"Not true."

"For madmen and poets then."

"Insidious nonsense," Ford said.

"You sure you're not a Christian?"

"Why?"

"If you're a Christian you gotta grab the notion that the Cross, suffering, they're the true aims of life, right?"

"I guess so."

"So if you commit suicide you don't suffer enough."

"Is life worth living? That's the question. Or is life necessarily suffering?"

"Is it?" Skip asked back.

Ford didn't answer. Skip took another long drink.

The bus rolled on. The old Indian land sunk in soot behind them. Fences squared off fields all around them. The bus got closer and closer to Clinton, farther and farther from Toronto.

To conceive this second child was a much more desperate gamble for her, a much more daring leap. It struck her as an absolute event, the hobble through the sickness and strain of pregnancy mysterious and futile all at once. She watched the child grow in her and saw the changes in her own body as the parasite inside sucked at it. The nine months seemed far too long, far too excessive for so few minutes of love-making. Their passions had become more and more silent and ensconced in habit. They knew each other's bodies and sounds and slowly entombed the possibilities for change. There remained Ernie's incessant haste, his inconsistent fatigue. There grew Katherine's need for more than intercourse of bodies to finally affirm her marriage and her life. Ernie did not sense her loss; he did not sense her growing weariness with the grey run through the days. And now the grey nights.

"So much suffering for new life," she told her father.

"And for dying," he reminded her.

Two final events: birth and death. Without words they were frank about his death, about its immanence. The ordinary mortal existence itself was stark before them when they visited together in the Clinton nursing home. Ernie came sometimes. She never left her father's bedside with a health wish nor did she comfort him with euphemisms, and neither did he expect such words. They reminisced a great deal. He wanted to be carried to the yard to see trees, moving people and the sky, but it was impossible. However, Katherine did arrange for his bed to be moved by a large bay window.

"I wake up so early now," he told her. "I think the leaves on that tree fold up a little at night to keep warm."

When he spoke of giving her and Ernie the house outright he saw the sadness in her face but said nothing. Ernie came to the nursing home with a lawyer and while Katherine watched, the house was signed over to her husband.

In November Katherine's father died. In January Ford was born.

The labour pains began early. They wracked her all through one night until she got up, dressed wearily, and carrying Elaine in her arms walked to Mrs. Kincaid's. Within the hour Katherine was at the *Colme District Hospital* being prepared for delivery. Toward the end of the first week of the child's life Ernie arrived back from a trip to Toronto. He was breathless at the bedside having run up the stairs from the street.

"It wasn't due for another week, they said," he said, standing over the bed, looking down at mother and son.

Katherine took the child home, nursed him, cleaned him. And he grew, as Elaine had grown, into facial features of his own, into a personality of his own. They had the child baptized at *St. Peter's Basilica* in London and when the priest touched his forehead with holy oil and holy water Ford hollered.

"There is no Saint Ford," the priest had said before the sacrament began.

"Well there's never going to be any Saint Ford if we don't start now," Ernie replied sarcastically, insisting on the name.

The priest politely relented but asked that they consider a 'Christian' name for Ford's confirmation.

Katherine detested her husband when he mocked the sacraments. She knew he really cared nothing about the tradition of naming children after saints. She knew that he taunted the ritual because he had no respect for it, or for any ritual or ceremony.

"If I could believe for one minute," he was fond of saying to her, "that God, yeah GOD, was really up there in that tabernacle thing, Christ I'd crawl up the goddam aisle. But oh no, you Catholics waltz in there, curtsy, and then stew and fart around in your pews like you were at the show. It is a movie; you got a script and actors, the whole shootin' match."

They drove home quietly. Ernie begrudged Katherine the one-hundred and forty mile round trip although he said nothing.

The snow came in glops; wet, heavy flakes caking on the windshield where the wipers couldn't reach. The defroster was on full and CKNX radio lulled them all through the storm. Katherine watched the road ahead, the fenced fields beside covered in white. She looked down at her little son who slept against her breast and at Elaine who was leaning against her father fast asleep. Katherine's mind worked through the sacrament they had just experienced.

*that He will grant to this Child that which
by nature he cannot have; that he may be
baptized with Water and the Holy Spirit,
and received into Christ's holy Church,
and be made a living member of the same*

Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world? How can he say, Katherine had thought; who can say whether he'll plunge to the depths of Hell or fall to the slopes of Purgatory? Do you, in the name of this child, seek Baptism into this faith? Robb

came all the way from Toronto to answer 'yes': *Take care that he be taught the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, and be further instructed in the Church Catechism.* What are the devil and his works, she thought as the priest made the sign of the cross in oil on Ford's brow. What will be your burdens and tasks, my little boy? She saw him out on the snow, the white snow, all alone; a genetic accident, a creature with a febrile brain, a bulging brain, seeing too much, taking too much, cutting through the face of things too fast to be part of them. She imagined the thick, wet flakes wafted about by winds finally falling on his little face and body swallowing up the eternity before and after, slowly covering him in cold white. And if men did not pass by in spring to make their furrows upon the ploughed land, to drive their plows over the bones of the dead, and if the sun did not pass by in spring to take the snow away, the little child would disintegrate there, undisturbed, except that the wind would take the dust and blow it from the bones sweetening all the earth around. The dust would settle in the grooves made by plows and mark a baptism and an extreme unction of snow. Katherine decided that the years would not matter: should the body be sixty years older it would only be bigger with more of the outside clinging and sticking to the inside -- *everything getting in*, and the baby's body would have little time for things to come in randomly, little time for the muscles to thicken like leather with work and foul air. Thus, more peace; it mattered not why here rather than there; why now rather than then.

Ernie drove on into the snow; he curled his lips to one side as

he drove. He looked straight ahead into the white, flakes coming at the car like silent powder bullets. The wiper blades swept them away, packing them at the edges of the window, while the air from the defroster made mountain-shaped clear spots and the radio lagged in the centre of the dashboard.

In Toronto Katherine tried to put aside the anarchy, the dark and silence she saw sometimes. She spent less time thinking about the quality of her days as they passed and marked less how the days entombed her hopes, her dreams forgotten. For several years she continued her routine, deferring her passions, forgetting her anger, masturbating herself to sleep sometimes after the *National* on C.B.C. television. For Katherine each day became more and more a question of chaos and anarchy. She perceived the order sustaining her physical existence as merely that set of conditions which gave rise to the organism initially and that set of conditions in which the organism was bound to live -- her organism. Simple enough, she had concluded to herself; but it was trying to see the virtual snap of time in which all that seemed order had become operative which baffled her. Her God became obscure to her and her prayers a matter of repetition and careless postponing.

At six-twenty on weekdays she got up and prepared the day's food for herself and the two children: a roast or cut of meat, seasoned, braized, sliced, wrapped in foil, ready for Elaine to put on the stove or into the oven when she and Ford got home from school. Directions written on the note pad attached to the refrigerator by a metallic clip telling Ford and Elaine what to do, what to prepare. Two lunches ready on the counter. At seven-thirty she woke them, turned on the radio, and left quietly once she was sure Elaine was up and in the bathroom.

After Katherine was gone the children came to the kitchen at different times, Ford usually first. He poured milk on *Shredded Wheat*

already in bowls on the table, or scooped hot porridge out of the pot on the stove. Together they washed the dishes before running down the stairs and on to school.

Katherine left the apartment in time to walk two blocks to catch the subway going south at Wellesley St. She was never so aggressive getting on as other morning commuters and she seldom sat down. Each morning she retreated behind the double bar adjacent every entrance, jiggled and juggled down to King East coming up to morning again to walk the block and a half to the *King Edward Sheraton Hotel*. There she stopped to buy a *Globe* and proceeded through the lobby, out the side door, and on the remaining half block to the *Western Insurance Company* building so that by eight-thirty she was at her machine, an I.B.M. keypunch assembly, typing programmes for men in offices nearby.

For the first ten months in Toronto she had collected seventy-seven dollars every Friday afternoon. Then she became a verifier and her salary increased to eighty-nine. Toward the end of her second year she became punch supervisor for accounts receivable for term plan programmes and her salary increased to one hundred and fourteen dollars per week.

To her co-workers she seemed ineffably dull; efficient and officious. The rhinestone ring and wedding band like a welt on her finger:

"She *is* married!"

But no one tried to penetrate into her private life. Katherine tolerated no random social intercourse with her peers and was graciously civil in declining invitations to supper, to tea, to showers, to company picnics. Her one friend was Lisa. They sustained a relationship by

keeping at a distance.

From her work she came directly home arriving shortly past six o'clock. Ford and Elaine waited for her and they all ate together. She said grace by rote before beginning, ate slowly, asked them about school. Sometimes Elaine talked at length during the meal and for periods of time which came in lots, Ford might talk with her about what he was doing. Then they washed the dishes, wiped the fridge, stove, table, counter top. Ford swept the floor and set the garbage in the hall. Later while the children did their homework Katherine would sit beside the window overlooking Dundonald Street reading, 'sometimes just staring out into the night, perhaps caressing the shiny firm leaves of the potted plant that grew in the window.

On Saturday morning she walked to the *Dominion Store* at Bloor and Jarvis to buy groceries returning always with two bags of food. Then she might take the subway south to *St. James Cathedral* or go to the *Toronto Public Library* at George and College, or visit the *Royal Ontario Museum*, wandering in its halls and rooms to marvel. Sometimes Ford accompanied her on these expeditions, especially to the museum. He loved ancient objects, historical details, artefacts. Often, Elaine went with her when she bought groceries.

At Christmas parcels would arrive from Colme and at Easter or in the summer Ford and Elaine would visit Colme. At least once a month Ernie would telephone that he was in town. Ford and Elaine would be treated to supper at the *Friar's* or at the *Brass Rail*. Katherine never stopped her children from meeting with their father but when they got back home her eyes would follow them until they felt guilty. They

described their outings with deference to their mother and answered her questions about their father to please her mood.

Ford in particular disliked coming home after being with his father. Their cautious alliance grated Katherine. From time to time Elaine sided with her mother against her father. Ford would watch the detente form and fall but slowly he learned how to avoid the confrontations.

During these early years in Toronto he chummed with three pals who knew nothing of the familial tension and who knew Ford as master schemer of things fun. They formed a club and Ford looked to his pals for the kinship and warmth he craved. They called themselves the *Bwana Boys* and even several years later when Ford's mother moved them nine blocks north to a small house, he continued his connection with the three pals. On their bicycles they ranged far from Dundonald and Church Streets, venturing into territories forbidden even *Cabbagetown* kids. Often, Ford awed his pals with stories of his father's exploits during World War II.

"She was an Arabian with red hair."

His father had met her on shore leave in Capetown, South Africa in 1942.

"We went up to Johannesburg by bus, four of us; I met her in an Afrikaner bar. Her father had a Bo-Plaas, that's a farm, high on the escarpment. We all went up there for a Braaivleis, that's a barbecue. He used to be a Bywoner, that's a share-cropper, before the First World War, squatting on some of the prettiest country in South Africa. We hit it off, him and I. But when he caught us pitchin' poo behind the barn he damn near chased me clear to Tanganyika. 'Voetsk-ak! Voetsak!

Get out! Get out!' he roared at us. 'Wragtig damned sailor!' We ended up in Pretoria drunker'n skunks and broker'n hell. And only six hours to get back to Cape Town or we're A.W.O.L."

"Did you make it back in time?" Ford asked.

"Nope. M.P.'s had to come and get us."

"Did they put you in the brig?"

"Nope. Couldn't afford to lose me. I was stoker, first class.

Had to be on duty to keep the ship going."

"What happened to the red-haired Arabian?"

"Never saw her again."

Bunky, Nort, Woody wondered about Ford's fabulous father. Their own fathers had been in the army too: Bunky's dad a reserve officer in North Bay, Ontario; Nort's dad doing convoy runs to Preswick; Woody's dad had gone with the Van-Doo's to Dieppe in 1941 and survived. But Ford's father went not only to England and France but also to Freemantle in Western Australia, and over to Canberra as well. He had been pampered by dark-skinned ladies in Bombay, he said, and in Kandy, Ceylon, he had come close to marrying a Prince's daughter.

"Did he ever get to China?"

"Escort carrier to Kowloon! H.M.S. Devonshire went right up the Peh River and popped holes in the Jap gun boats."

In Makasar the Devonshire was shelled into dry dock. They limped into New Caledonia.

"We sat out the war; Yankees everywhere! Holy shit, were there a lot of Yanks in Caly."

The *Bwana Boys* planned world trips on motorcycles, choppers, thun-

dering across the plateaus of Malawi or winging the switchbacks in Nyasaland, hoping the next petrol station might be at the bottom of the hill. They longed for South African beaches and copper-breasted Polynesian women. It would all happen; of that they were certain. And by day, for the present, and by night, they planned and executed their adventures, tickling the surface of the fun that lay ahead.

Ford organized them into grate-grubbing squads. They invaded city streets that still had grill grates beside buildings and they fished with gum and string for dimes, nickles, pennies. Ford arranged a one night a week job for the four of them putting chairs back in St. Mary's Church basement after Bingo on Monday nights. Bunky had a job stocking *Super City Discount Foods* shelves on Wednesday nights. Ford convinced him to sabotage the canned stews by substituting *Ken-L-Stew* for any appropriately sized tin by switching labels. Bunky eventually learned how to perform similar switches for gourmet cat food tins and tuna and sardine tins. They all roared imagining the indigestion of consumers and store lawyers. On one occasion Ford and Nort applied to *Casper Cartwright's School for Girls* by mail and when summoned for interviews had girls lined up to pose as them; but they were baffled by the problem of requisite attending parents.

They rigged up a telephone receiver in a bag of groceries. Ford absconded with carrots and a *Catelli* spaghetti box from his mother's cupboard. The others did the same from their mothers' pantries. Nort ripped the telephone receiver out of the booth at Wellesley and Yonge. Ford connected a dry cell to a bell and slid the workings into a small brown bag and when he pushed the button which he could feel through the

paper, the bell rang. The most memorable occasion of using the grocery-bag-telephone-trick as they called it, happened in the *City Grill Restaurant*. Woody reached into the grocery bag, fumbling among the carrot tops and *Libby's* deep-browned beans for the telephone receiver.

"Hello," he answered quietly, the cord connected to the receiver disappearing into the grocery bag.

People in the restaurant sitting at the counter grinned or looked perplexed.

"It's for you," Woody announced, handing the receiver to a young woman whose two small boys mucked in sundaes beside her.

"Tell them I'm not at home," she answered curtly and resumed her hamburger.

And they pursued girls relentlessly; a vital step in the grand rush toward adventure. They followed them on bicycles:

"Hey bitch how's yer twat?"

Always poking fun at virgin Ford who was especially ill-at-ease with Donna Bignell. They went down into a small ravine in Lessing Park to coax her pants from her, tickle her tiny nipples and rub the new fuzz below her belly.

"Keep pumpin', it'll come," Nort sneered at Woody one night.

"Best friends Woody's got're Mother Nature and her four daughters," Bunky hee-hawed. Ford watched them, made few jokes, but had plenty of ideas for excitement. One day Nort asked him bluntly:

"O.K., tell me what happens to a girl when she's getting it."

Ford dug around in his head for an answer, clawing for some fact from *Culper's Complete Home Doctor*. He agonized in private over his

sudden sexuality and collected clippings from men's magazines. He took baths in the middle of the day. Questions like Nort's embarrassed and confused him.

"She gets wet," he offered.

"He knows!" they laughed.

"I know," he said.

March 24, 1961
Toronto, Ontario.

Delores Randel,
c/o True Confessions
16974 Broadway N.E.,
New York 2008, N.Y.

Dear Delores:

I read about your problem in True Confessions. My problem has been similar to yours. I have developed far too quickly and my sexual drive far exceeds my age. You ask for reader advice. I think you should keep your child because that's what God intended and you'll feel better in the long run because you'll know where it is. Tell Michael he'll have to stick by you during the worst.

Sincerely,

F.P. Giffen,
321 Dundonald St. E.,
Toronto, Ont., Canada

Two summers later during one of Ford's short summer visits to Colme his father came home on a Saturday afternoon like a missionary and took him to *Lynch's Drug Store*. It had occurred to Ernie suddenly that Ford was ready.

"Ramsies come lubricated. Get Ramsies. Only test them out before you use them."

And Ford pretended much knowledge to shield himself from the embarrassment. John Lynch, Phm.B., tall and red-nosed, treated the father-son conference going on in front of his dispensary with a careful aloofness.

During these visits to Colme Ford often felt like an intruder, more often like a tolerated visitor. His father was seldom home and when he was he did not really involve his son in his life. He gave Ford money or drove him into Goderich to see a movie; but Ford could not feel genuinely at ease. Something always seemed ulterior in their relationship.

"Elizabeth, this is my son, Ford; he lives with his mother in Toronto," Ernie announced at the front door of Elizabeth's house several miles outside Colme along No. 86 highway. They had come for Saturday dinner. After the meal Elizabeth and Ernie drove to the *Hartley House* in Hanover leaving Ford to watch *Great Movies* on Elizabeth's console television. He sensed that his father enjoyed, almost jealousy guarded, the mobility and independence his mother had made possible.

Ford's old friends in Colme also welcomed him with less and less enthusiasm. At first he laughed off the abuse he got about his father's affair with Daphne Anderson:

*Ernie Giffen done 'er wrong
Fuck'd 'er with his six foot dong*

He too mocked his father's 'cradle job', but at the same time was aware of far more significant erosions in his Colme friendships.

He and his friends found themselves reminiscing constantly or awkwardly trying to relive past experiences: hunting ground hogs near the river with old 22's; wandering around the toilet seat factory, long

closed down but wealthy with mahogany seats, dowel joints, oil cans, old machinery, and a magnificent system of pulleys and gears going from floor to floor.

Ernie Giffen got 'er wheee!
Now she needs a D'n C

They had masturbation contests on the third floor. At first Ford was repelled, almost disgusted by the game. Eddy Arnold invariably ejaculated first. They developed endless variations of their game involving not only speed but the actual number of strokes, distance, number of times, and so on.

Eventually Ford found himself avoiding his old buddies whenever he was in Colme. But sometimes even this was impossible. Larry Quinting got his father's car on Saturday nights and when Ford was invited along on the endless search for 'poon-tang' he quickly became annoyed and bored. In Toronto there were always girls who would screw without elaborate pantomimes and automobiles. In Colme the procedure always seemed linked to cars and to a muddy-looking homemade liquor called 'home-brew'. There were always the abandoned barns at the end of well-worn lanes. The first time it had been a novelty to him, but each time he was with Larry and Eddy they made the same slow and easy bee line for the same bootlegger and the same barn. His first girl had been named "Licker" by the guys.

"She'll lap it up like milk," Eddy squealed.

"Ah comeon' Giff, let 'er blow your juggers. She loves it!"

But it bored him. He wasn't afraid; it just seemed that the spontaneous and bold dealings he and the *Bwana Boys* had in Toronto were far

more exciting, far more challenging. Larry and Eddy's girls needed the security of the ritual, the same lines, the same liquor, the same roads; and always, the girls went in pairs. One night, though, they picked up Sandra Harding near the Town Hall pay phone. Ford drew lots with the other two to see who would go into the back seat first. He drew third and when his turn came they couldn't find him. He had started walking back up the lane. When they stopped to pick him up Sandra pretended she was greatly offended by the rebuff.

"Thinks he's a big smart balls from the city. We're not good enough for you here, eh Ford? Not any more."

Back in Toronto Ford expected and underwent casual grillings from his mother. She asked him about his father's activities, especially about Elizabeth. He was evasive and left the room when she brought up the subject.

Finally he started to speak contemptuously of his mother to his friends. He threatened to run home to Colme even though he found neither home warmer or happier or better. In the summer of his fifth year in Toronto the four *Bwana Boys* had planned such an escape but it fell through when Bunky's parents took him on vacation to Long Point.

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"What is it?" Skip asked straining to see out the window of the bus.

Other passengers toward the front were partly standing, trying to discover what had made the bus suddenly lurch and then slow almost to a crawl, its air brakes blasting every few seconds.

"I can't see," Ford answered. "What does it matter?"

The bus jumped to the left suddenly, the motor roaring under the floorboards.

"Whatever it was he almost hit him," Skip said, settling back into his seat.

"Why does it have to be a *him* he almost hit?" Ford demanded.

"I suppose it could be a woman learning how to drive."

The bus gained speed quickly. An empty farm wagon with high slat sides appeared beside them pulled by a green tractor. The farmer was standing behind the steering wheel, bent slightly at his middle, one hand holding his straw hat to his head. Ford caught sight of the huge rear wheels, their thick black tread spinning backwards.

"They should ban those guys from the highway; it's dangerous!" Skip protested.

The bus reached cruising speed leaving the farmer and his load far behind. The passengers settled back into their seats comfortable and unconcerned again at sixty miles per hour.

The summer of the *Bwana Boys'* planned escape Ford actually did go to Colme but he came back early to Toronto to take a part time job at *Oshawa Wholesale* stocking shelves. It was during the following autumn that he began to imagine his mother in furtive affairs with unknown men on the nights he had to work. He began to watch her for any sign of romance, marvelling at her celibacy and wishing she would upset the routine of their home by introducing a new man into it. But each night he came home to find her alone by the window reading and fingering the leaves of the potted plant beside her. He wished she would go out, would wander down the neon-bright Yonge Street only a few blocks away. He wanted her to expose herself to the possibility of a man.

Yonge Street flashes constant warnings to people who are not self-reliant. It says to them that they must take care to mingle in bars and watch out for people with bad breath, loose plates, jarred toupes, running mascara. It tells them to fly *BOAC* to London now at the century's cheapest rates. It offers *Lufthansa* to Munich for the *Oktober Bier Fest*. It flays people who are free for an hour or more at noon with suggestive whips: hot sandwich specials made up of meat that the night before was left on patrons' plates beside six-bit tips. It volunteers pictures of big titted go-go dancers who bump just beyond arm's length for no cover charge.

But at nights its warnings are far more devastating. It reminds people in cars that street cops have been instructed to send them tickets for defective rear lights. It challenges the penniless to keep moving. It encourages the renting of flats in St. James Town hives

so that the next best thing to doing is being there. Venturing downtown at night, then, has its market threats to any pre-arranged continuums. There is always this polyester knit man in moustache whose car has been securely parked a pleasant block's walk away for a buck flat rate. You might brush by him at the *Golden Nugget* at seven and wonder how he managed to hop along to the *Tiffany* by nine. He has endless reserves of one-dollar-tens for screw-drivers and daqueries; and his wrists are hairy enough to suggest more.

Ford would return at night, sometimes very late, from places somewhere among the flashes. He knew his mother disapproved of his cocky independence. When she confronted him she always knew that no arbitrariness could make him submit. He excelled at school, his only conventional obligation. He accepted the uneasy hostility that lurked at the surface of their relationship but as he advanced through his teen years the hostility found more and more expression. He and Katherine erupted into debates about evolution, about the Immaculate Conception, about the divinity of Christ. Ford knew he could be glib and when he fed that pliant verbal ability with books and discussions he felt alive and powerful. His sister bored him with her half-thought-out notions about life and death. His own precocious philosophies and analyses made him arrogant with her. His mother, though, interested him with her easily wrung vehemence and ferocity in debate about fundamental issues: God, marriage, sex, politics. She never wanted to discuss them, but when he pressed a point or manipulated her into making a stand, her eyes became fiery and threatening. His contacts with Elaine were far less stimulating.

"What are you waiting for?" he would ask Elaine.

"I'm not waiting for anything; what are you talking about?" she would answer, her face twisted and perplexed. She felt that he knew something she didn't.

"Yes you are; you're waiting for the end of high school, aren't you? Then you're waiting to get married. Then you're waiting to have kids. Then you'll wait till they grow up. Then you wait till both of you retire and the mortgage is paid. Then you wait to die; probably prepay your stupid grave plots. It hangs like a millstone, Elaine. Let's face it, you're waiting for death."

He eyed her up and down, her small breasts, thick legs, vulnerable countenance, her helpless weak eyes.

"You'll be lucky to land a man."

He was cruel to her because she was so close and so vulnerable. He regretted his impulses to annihilate her. Mostly, he abhorred people who were predictable, who were not bearing what he thought to be the same weights he had to bear: weights of insight and awareness of his society, of the people and their roles in it. When he felt he could detect someone's limitations he wanted to crush him. He yearned for strong, deliberate friends and family, untrammelled by external ascendencies. He didn't want to have to protect those who came along from what he might be impulsively motivated to declare about them. He felt contempt for anyone who shuffled through life making noise about petty quotidian sufferings which he felt must not only be endured but expected.

The passivity of his friends at school numbed him. They spoke of university as a job mill; fiddled and diddled around about sex, described

life as a procedure of 'getting set'. He saw life in none of these dormant and quiescent tones and was always aware of a severe and pungent violence underlying everything. He saw such violence and fire in his mother's eyes when he got her going on some topic at the dinner table. Ford craved that energy and learned early how to overcome her role as parent in order to challenge her even more strongly as individual. Where Elaine would become easily intimidated and dispassionate, Katherine would stay staid and grave until some remark lured her into a response. This mercurial temper delighted Ford and for a long time he played with it, impatient with those whose passions were inferior to it.

He especially enjoyed challenging his mother's increasingly tepid religious beliefs, choosing to label them as non-beliefs. Ford accused her of formalities foisted on her by a dulling repetitiveness.

"You don't really believe in Hell," he told her one afternoon.

"I believe there is a Hell," she said coldly, not looking up from her book.

"Where?"

"Its location is unknown."

"Why must there be a Hell? In time and space?"

"To punish."

"Who decides what's punishable and what isn't?"

"God."

"Not Jesus?"

"And Jesus."

"And Mary?"

Katherine looked up, her lips tightening a bit, her eyes finally

returning slowly to her book.

"In a certain way," she said quietly.

"You believe she's alive, her body up in Heaven?"

"I think so. The Church teaches that."

"*Maryology* is a myth!"

"Why do you call it *Maryology*?"

"It's a phenomenon of the Catholic Church. You think she was a virgin?"

"Of course she was."

Katherine was becoming uneasy.

"What's so great about being a virgin?" Ford demanded.

"Don't be so contentious! Just because the girls you hang around with are regenerate delinquents is no . . ."

"I'd far prefer a slut to a Christian broad."

"Ford! I'll not discuss your sluts with you or your Christian girls or anything about your dejected friends. Your mouth is foul and disrespectful of me and your religion."

"I have no religion," Ford said quickly.

There was a civility to their mutual antagonism. If Katherine tried to discipline Ford or to silence him she met with articulate arguments and undermining commentary.

"Christian girls are almost the dullest creatures born. They're about as wholesome as ditch water. They're banal and flat chested."

Katherine tried not to be alarmed by his jibes. She tried not to let him see how she could be affronted and shocked. She resented his bluntness and bristled when it raised her to anger. All the while both

wanted a communion, though; a collaboration where their fears and animosities might not chafe and kindle their connection. Ford wanted his mother to declare her needs, to make a move. He was pleasantly surprised when she finally did change her routine.

For also on Yonge Street, especially near Bloor, are the second-floor places just above the flashing signs. They might be massage parlours: to be most obvious about it; but Finance Companies also inhabit them. There are hair-removing companies on those second floors, and chiropractors, and lawyers: barrister-solicitors for hire by the minute. *Kathy Krinlin's Dance Studios* offered Lisa Pipkin a ticket by mail to the second floor, and bring a friend for free to 331 Yonge.

They must funnel through the flickers that skip over Yonge Street's opposite face and they must hide their eyes from the glare of the neon signs out the window; but inside they can't hear the cars. Katherine decided not to resist. After all, chirped her friend, she lived in the latitude of southern France and northern Italy, among the spin-off of American affluence.

"But what do they do?" she had asked Lisa.

"You meet men," Lisa answered. "And you dance."

There were nights when it was bearable. There were nights when it was silly to crave them. There were nights when Ernie might have come to visit the children and have found her so weak and ready that there might have been a new moment, a new time for them. But the months and years had dulled all that into a quiet acceptance. Katherine reduced her expectations and watched her children grow.

Ford once pawed a girl on the couch after Katherine had gone to bed.

The grey light from the television silhouetted them like ghosts as she watched them grinding at each other. She watched mutely, and let them be; later she suffered in her bed.

Elaine was less bold. Her boys came politely and left politely. Katherine imposed curfews and enforced them, wanted her children to bring their people home to the living room, to the kitchen. But in a crisis, when there were lovers there so close to her, she had no rage to stop them.

"What will I wear?" Katherine asked Lisa.

Ford teased her. In the back of his mind, though, his mother's cry:

there will be no divorce, Ernie, no divorce

Not only their property held them.

He knew that his father watched with high-powered binoculars; he listened while his father asked questions; he waited while his father lurked, ready to pounce on her: "I'll get the grounds!" he had threatened. Once Ford saw his father's empty car a block away and rushed home to see him; but found his father had never been there.

"Mother are you going out?" Elaine asked rhetorically.

Lisa arrived, dressed to kill, as Ford exclaimed.

"We're going to a class," Katherine answered.

"Night school? I don't remember you saying you were taking any courses," Ford said.

"Why do you pester me so?" Katherine replied. There was a smile in her question.

Ford and Elaine knew she was excited.

"Be home by twelve," Ford said as the two women walked down the

stairs.

Ford and Elaine mused about it.

"Imagine! A dancing class. I'll bet it costs plenty," said Elaine.

The class was held one floor up. They gripped their purses nervously in curled palms: Katherine let Lisa go ahead. The first door read:

Chiropractor: Dr. Wm. Tindall

and the second was the place. Lisa was about to knock.

"Don't knock. It says walk in."

They entered and found a narrow, long room with chairs all about, and a small desk at the far end. Men and women there, most middle-aged, sitting and standing. The receptionist at the desk smiled widely at them and Katherine and Lisa walked self-consciously down the middle toward her.

"It's very expensive. I'll really have to think it over," Katherine said to Lisa later when they walked down the stairs leading to the subway.

"Well, I'm taking it," Lisa cried. "Did you see all those men? There must be two to one."

"Not that many."

"I liked Mr. Cooper. Did you get to dance with Mr. Cooper?"

"Yes. But two hundred eighty-five dollars?"

"Twenty lessons."

"Yes, twenty lessons."

"It's like a social club; not like a school at all."

"Yes," Katherine replied.

"This is Mr. Cooper."

"Katherine, I think they can call me Sebastian."

"Hello," said Elaine.

Ford shook Sebastian's hand and Katherine led her guest to the living room for tea before supper.

"How old are you?" Sebastian asked Ford.

"Nineteen, just."

Then Sebastian began to speak about his life in the Canadian West.

"When I was nineteen I was just leaving home for the first time. I was raised and praised in the Peace River Country, in a little place called Spirit River," he said, arms akimbo, eyes sparkling and happy.

"Plumb in the way of the road over to Dawson Creek."

"Dawson? You mean like in Klondike?" Ford asked.

"Bottom end of the *Alaska Highway*. Mile 0."

"You ever been to Alaska?"

"Twice; once to Fairbanks. But spent most of my time up in the Yukon. Whitehorse, Haines Junction, and in a little spot in the bush called Snag."

"Snag?" Elaine asked.

"Snag; and for a fella without a damn good jeep or something as solid you're bound to get solid snagged on that stretch of Number 2."

"You been on the Nahanni River?" Ford asked.

"Yep. South Nahanni down to Fort Simpson; then by riverboat down-river along the MacKenzie to Fort Good Hope. She was a fish-packer. Good boat."

"Ever been to Inuvik?"

"Not yet," said Sebastian, getting up and following Katherine and Elaine to the dinner table.

"Why'd you come east?" asked Elaine when they sat down to eat.

"And south," added Ford, his mouth full of potato.

Katherine shook her head.

"Pass the gravy, please, Ford; and leave Sebastian to eat."

"I came east to get married," Sebastian laughed.

"To get married?" Elaine remarked, surprised.

"A youthful indiscretion. We're all bound to do it sooner or later."

"Then you are married?" Ford asked.

"That's quite enough!" Katherine thundered, the friendly tone of the catechism now shattered. Sebastian raised his ample eyebrows.

"It's all right, Kathy, it's all right."

"It's not all right. It's none of his business. Ford, for heaven's sake mind your own affairs; Sebastian's personal life is none of your concern."

"Kathy, don't get upset. It was an innocent question. He's just on the lookout for his old lady's welfare. You want to make sure her men are on the up and up, don't you Ford?"

Ford grimaced, shook his head blankly. He had no such concern in his mind.

"Anyway, I was married," Sebastian went on. "For fifteen years. I'm clean as a whistle now, divorced and done."

"I'm sorry," Ford said quietly to his mother. "I didn't mean anything by it."

An uneasy tension dropped over the table. Sebastian looked at Katherine and then resumed his story.

"Then I lived in Newfie. Cooks Harbour; near three years."

"One extreme to another," Ford said. "Is it true that Newfies are all part Beothuk?"

"Newfie's a strange place to live. Beothuks were all wiped out a century ago. Met an old man in a town called Savage Cove, though; claims he's got a mad Beothuk kid. Keeps the kid chained to a post in the back yard. Kid's got teeth as sharp as knives, they say. Come near him he'd tear your arm off or sink his jowls clean into your neck."

"Didn't the Health Authorities intervene?" Katherine asked.

"Nearest cops and docs were down in Deer Lake, couple hundred miles south and they didn't do anything about it. People in Savage Cove liked the kid and they liked the old man too; didn't want any trouble for either of 'em. In the winter the kid lived in a heated barn but only the old man could feed him; only person the kid'd trust. Otherwise kid'd starve or get himself killed."

"Is he still there?"

"Likely; but I haven't been back in five years."

They went to the living room for coffee. Katherine sat in the big brown arm chair and Sebastian sat comfortably on the couch beside Elaine. Ford squatted on the floor.

"Can't you sit like a gentleman?" Katherine complained.

Elaine's eyes moved solemnly down. Ford ignored the comment and only frowned. No more was said but everyone felt the tension. Ford spoke very little after that.

Sebastian came again for supper the next week. At first, Katherine joked about how bachelors needed home-cooked meals and eventually he became a regular visitor. He came in his car to take Katherine to the dancing classes. After the lesson they might go out for coffee or for a drink. Lisa often accompanied them, Katherine was careful to report. Finally Sebastian took Katherine to a party on a night other than a class night. When she got home Ford was sitting in the kitchen reading. A sullen little line had set about his mouth. In the silence that followed Katherine prepared herself coffee.

"Where's Sebastian?" Ford finally said.

"Home; where he should be at this hour of the night. Why?"

Ford reached up and touched her arm. She moved instantly away to get a cup.

"He can move in here, you know. I wouldn't mind. It would be all right."

"Good lord, Ford; whatever brought *that* on?" Katherine replied from the counter, turning around.

"Elaine doesn't mind either. We talked it over."

"There's *nothing* to talk over; you presumptuous fools!"

"Mother, don't you think ten years is long enough? Ten? It's twelve."

"Long enough for what? Do you think I'm like your father; that I have to have sex to live? That I can't survive without a man?"

She sat down at the table.

"There's lust and there's renunciation," Ford began. "You're strong, but you're still young and attractive, certainly to Sebastian

and probably to others. But maybe you won't let yourself."

"Who are you to talk to me about it? And what is there to talk about? This is ridiculous!"

Ford toyed with the spoon in the sugar bowl. His mother tried to collect her wits but he had pierced her with his statement and his questions. He spoke as her peer, asserted a curious but strong authority of understanding over her. She was aware of his power but at that moment had not decided what her feelings were for Sebastian; and thinking about Sebastian she found herself at a loss. There was only being with Sebastian for brief periods, the dancing class acting as a pivot for them, pressing them to other bases for meeting and being together. But she knew every minute what Sebastian was and what he could ever be to her.

"I like Sebastian," she said. "He is a very kind and warm man; but I can never be with him, certainly never live with him. I don't want another husband."

"I didn't say husband."

"I won't live openly with him!"

"Why?"

"Ford, what kind of question is that? He can't; that's all. He can't. I won't have it. What purpose?"

"You'd have a man, someone to be with. You know damn well dad's not been sitting around celibate for ten years."

"You think a woman needs a man to be complete?"

"Not necessarily."

"Ford, I won't discuss this with you."

She stood up and carried her coffee cup into the living room and

sat by the window in the dark.

The next day Ford told Elaine how she had reacted. Elaine shrugged her shoulders and went off to school.

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The following September Ford enrolled at the University of Toronto. He intended to get into the Honours History programme. He wasn't at all sure of his direction or intentions, but was willing to let himself be swept along by doing what everyone expected he should do. There had never really been any serious question about his going to university although his father questioned its value.

"It's all theory," Ernie had said. "What's it do for living right now?"

His father was annoyed for a long time that he had taken on an hourly-rated job at *Oshawa Wholesale* to scrape together enough money for tuition and books.

"You took the hard way," his father told him. "And going to University's the hard way to make it too. There are easier ways to get set up."

"Set up for what?"

"Set up! Simply set up! With enough money coming in to pay for what you want."

"I don't know what I want."

"Well you're sure you want to go to University, aren't you? That's one thing you want."

"I'm not even sure I want that."

"Then why are you going?"

"What else have I got to do?"

"There's lots to do; set up a business, start putting together a portfolio of investments. Get a head start on those eggheads who think

a degree or diploma'll get them a head start on you. Shit, you'll have four years on them, probably more."

"I don't see life that way, dad. I don't see it as a race against time, as a race to get the bigger share of the big pie in the sky. I just don't seem to be able to get excited about what *can* be in the future. More and more, I'm concerned about what *is*, now."

"Ah, you'll grow out of that," his father answered sarcastically and patronizingly.

"Maybe."

Ford knew in advance that he would have to live with his mother and sister for the first year of University because he couldn't afford to set up housekeeping on his own. When he returned from his visit to Colme, Katherine wanted to know if her husband had offered to help him out with money.

"Did you ask him for part of the tuition?"

"I could have asked him for five hundred bucks and he'd've sweat bricks to get it just to prove to you he could put that much money free together at once. I don't want my going to university to be fuel for any of your disputes. You two can fight your own battles. I can make it by myself if I have to."

"I suppose you told him about Sebastian?" Katherine asked.

"He already knew."

"Specifically?"

"No."

"What did you tell him?"

"Specifically?"

"Yes."

"That you're taking dancing lessons and that you've got a new boyfriend."

"Why did you have to tell him that? Boyfriend? You know that'll bring him running and spying on me like a madman."

"No it won't."

"Why did you have to say anything?"

"What was I supposed to say? NO, she ISN'T happy this year?"

"It's not happy; happiness."

"I know. But it's not renunciation either.. You are alive you know."

"You shouldn't have told him anything. He'll use it against us."

"Against you."

"Against me."

"Why don't you divorce him and be done with it?"

"I can't; I made my choice."

"You made a choice; a forgotten one."

"How would you know how forgotten it is? How can you know what it meant for me to leave? Do you think marriage is some kind of casual agreement between adolescents?"

"That's a fine description of the marriages I've seen."

"What marriages have you seen? What have you seen at your age?"

"Enough to know you're a fool to cut yourself off from other men."

"How can you talk to your own mother about being a fool? About other men?"

"Does your husband make any fuss about having Elizabeth? He

spends a lot of time at her place and God knows how many other women he's got."

"They're not *living* together. He knows it's my house he's living in."

"That's not what the mortgage says."

"Your father can be forced out; he'll have to give me back the house and the land."

"It's true, you could force his hand. Why don't you? He'll let it ride and ride if you don't."

"Did he say he was coming to Toronto anytime?"

"Less and less. He doesn't care about Sebastian."

"You told him Sebastian's name?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"He asked me."

Katherine crumpled the newspaper on the kitchen table, and glared at her son who was so old so young, who had never been willing to take her side, to take it completely. She suppressed a compulsion to strike him.

"You're betraying me!" she said.

"How am I *betraying* you? What are you hiding?"

"I've got nothing to hide. I've done nothing wrong."

"Then forget about dad. He doesn't care anymore; it's too late."

"You don't know your father."

"Probably I don't, but I do know he's so busy with his own stupid little schemes that none of this matters to him. You won't sue for a

divorce and he can't start proceedings unless you agree. You've got him stuck. You like that, don't you?"

"If he . . ." Katherine began.

"Eh?"

"No . . . nothing."

She met his eyes. They were troubled. She was determined not to jeopardize her position. It was clear to her that Ford was not at all intimidated by her nor was he pressed by any former patterns of deference, or by any concern for her fears and apprehensions. He seemed so direct, so bluntly sudden. Ford stood up to go.

"I've got an early class," he explained.

"Did he say he'd help you out with university at all?"

"Yes, he mentioned he wanted to, but he won't, can't unless like I already told you he takes it in his head to prove something to you."

"You can forgive him for that or just slough it off, can't you? He lets us fend for ourselves for years and makes promises he never keeps. He lives a big lie."

"Yes he does live a big lie. But so do you. So do I. I can't decide who lives the biggest lie."

Ford put his dishes in the sink and left. On his way to class he regretted his patronizing and arrogant attitude toward his mother. He realized that he made her suffer. Later at her own work Katherine called Sebastian and told him that Ernie knew.

No more was said about Ford's visit to Colme. The next morning for a brief moment Katherine's eyes seemed about to trust Ford with a warming smile but she was at once aware of a debilitating fear in herself:

the fear of making an error, of exposing too much, of acting now in a way which would disestablish many of her years alone in Toronto. And all the while Sebastian pressed her about marriage. She knew she had nothing to fear from her children; they were indifferent. She couldn't pin-point the threat even though she could see through to her loneliness, to the finality of her separateness, wanting nothing to be used against her later. She surprised herself by admitting that she did not fear to be alone or to be spurned, did not fear to leave whatever she had to leave. She understood the cost in years, in lifetimes. To her, Sebastian was passing by. He was passing by through on his way to death too and although she expected little from him, she craved the moment with him, the moment which annihilated from her mind the essential fact of her consciousness: the clarity with which she saw her condition. And she was silent with her understanding, alone in her exiled Toronto living room, deliberate, almost vulpine and cunning in her acceptance. Let the dead bury the dead, and let the dead marry the dead, she thought to herself. She took a small cream pitcher and filled it with water. Then she poured the water into the soil of the potted plant in the living room window. Tiny shoots, weeds, were popping through the soil. She had never let it go in their apartment on Dundonald. But the tiny shoots were no threat yet to the huge plant they grew around.

"I've been neglecting it," she thought to herself.

22

People sitting near them in the bus watched them, uncomfortable and disapproving. From time to time Ford and Skip's voices were loud enough to solicit a glance in the rear view mirror from the driver.

"Take you and me," Skip Penbenny said in a loud whisper; "we're not so fooled are we?"

"No, not fooled," Ford answered. "But there's not a thing to be done about it. What am I to do? Challenge the world views of every Platonist and Christian in existence?"

"Your problem's you don't see any alternatives."

"Your problem's you don't really have any to offer because there really aren't any. Here we are, two lapsed Catholics, swooning in our creative mourning over the death of a world view that shows no signs of old age let alone extinction."

"Precisely," Skip said, "and let it be a lesson to us how devious a lot they all are, showing their greatest strength before their greatest fall."

"There's some way to get through to them," Ford murmured after a few minutes. "We can explain the idea of opposites and dichotomies. I think they'd understand that, and then maybe see that they're getting at the world only one way."

"See? Understand? What do they mean? See -- with your eyes you mean? Stand under an idea? Is that what the words mean?"

"The western Christians see the universe as a set of polarities," Ford began; "God-Devil, Good-Evil, Heaven-Hell, Grace-Sin. The imperative is to set up a contest, a duel, a battle. God must prevail over

the Devil. Heaven must prevail over Hell. Good must win out over Evil. Dozens of dichotomies, doubling as paths to a singular truth. When really they're only part of the same coin. Christ, even the words tell it clearly. Take the last letter of the word 'God' and add it to the word 'evil' and you get God's opposite, the 'Devil'. Turn God upside down and you get the Devil. Nietzsche's right when he says that mankind's got to become better and more evil. One's up to the other's down. One's on to the other's off. Can't get better without getting worse too. It's all the same."

The bus slowed suddenly, the sudden pitch of the engines signalling the gearing down. It turned into a small ~~BA~~ station that served the village of St. Columban and a passenger got on. The door closed and the bus lunged ahead on Highway No. 8 heading for Clinton. Ford and Skip did not talk for the five miles to Seaforth. Ford watched the landscape pass by his window: the fence posts along the ditch a blur, and farther back, the fields and their colours inching past, a slow and moving panorama of greens and browns. And always, field after field, the distinct fence lines with rows of trees which had survived the clearing a century earlier. And always, the silver silos at each family barn, standing like silver bullets. There were dairy cattle in some of the fields, their heads down at the ground grazing, languid and indifferent in their huge cells. Some of them were squatting on the ground bunched together under the shade of a tree, a kind of respite in the life of a cow on a hot afternoon. Like drops of blue, the salt blocks, near fences attracting calves like candy. And also on the land, in the slow film of it flowing at Ford's window, the farmers and their

machines: huge red and green tractors pulling cultivators or towing wagonfulls of hay along lanes. Everywhere movement on the land; everywhere the land being churned with use.

The bus stopped in Seaforth and passengers moved on and off carrying luggage and destinations locked in their heads and hands. When it started up again Ford turned to Skip:

"I haven't thought it out. I don't have any vast intuitive vision of it all. I can't get it all pat; there's a least common denominator though."

Ford looked out the window and Clinton was already in sight. There he would have to change busses to go north to Colme on Highway No. 4. The highway followed the CN trunk line which headed west to Goderich and land's end. There were no trains on it as the bus followed along, but on its flanks, fields, neat, fenced, running north and south.

"I just don't like how they get the land," Ford said. "That must be the root of my ennui. I don't like how it's always a matter of a fight."

"You lick it or it licks you," Skip announced.

"But you've got to trust the land."

"Sentimental excrescence. Look, you trust the land and you'll starve."

Ford raised his hand to point at the cultivated land to the south. They both looked at it for a long time before Ford finally asked:

"Can't you picture them?"

"Who?"

"The men who were here first: the *Iroquois*, *Mississaugas*, *Hurons*,

Cherokees, Eries, Tionontatis, Patuns . . . then came the steamrollers, Jesuit missionaries reeking with their messianic gusto, stamping out cultures that had thrived for centuries."

"The strong shall survive."

"Yes I know," Ford answered. "It's not a question of justice, is it?"

There was another silence. Ford's eyes were as melancholy as a monkey's.

"And then came the white settlers," he continued suddenly. "They plowed all the Indians into reserves: *Grand River, Bay of Quinte, Manitoulin, Walpole Island, Muncey, Curve Lake, Sauble . . .* Can you picture one of them? there by that barn? His Protestant guts filled with wheat, some young buck out from York, a broad axe on his shoulder like a cross, reached puberty in a square-timber hut, figures the world's getting better because flint and steel are passe and modern men have lucifer matches and cartridge bullets instead of single balls? He probably was pap-nursed, rocked to reason in a sap-trough cradle. Maybe he's got a percussion cap in the house and an old flintlock on the mantle: first antique. And if all he's got to look forward to is a dug-out log for a coffin, he's going to fight the good fight. So he spends his life struggling to make his days more comfortable, more humane, he figures. Maybe striving to be comfortable is human, I suppose. Maybe human is suffering, though. Maybe human means don't fight."

"But it *does* mean fight!" Skip said.

"Yes, perhaps it does. It has."

"It does," Skip asserted.

"But I lost what being human means. I don't know what it means."

"Doesn't mean anything. Whatever men do, that's human. It's all human, all of it," Skip said quickly like a teacher.

"Why did they come? Who dragged them here across the ocean to mould their heaven and hell here too?"

"It was here, the land. They saw it from their boats. They came. They were stronger."

Ford flopped back in his seat. Skip settled back into his a few seconds later and closed his eyes. After a moment Ford absent-mindedly opened his book. The bus slowed, stopped, started, through the streets of Clinton. The whine and drone of the engines racing up and down pounded at him:

It is most extraordinary, so long as Canada has been settled, that its great natural advantages should still be so little known; that so many persons who are either compelled by necessity to emigrate, or who do so from choice, should continue to pass it by and go on to the west of the United States, or otherwise emigrate to the more distant colonies of the Cape, New South Wales, or New Zealand; and yet such is the case . . .

They all came, they all saw, and they all conquered the piss out of what they came and saw, he murmured half-consciously.

"Eh?" Skip said, his eyes still closed.

"Nothing. I'm just getting melodramatic," Ford answered.

Is it from the nature of the government that the States are so much more desirable as a place of residence -- where the only law is mob law, and the bowie knife is the constant companion of citizens and is used even in the halls of legislature themselves? Or is New Zealand much to be preferred, where the settler in taking his morning ramble, to acquire an appetite for breakfast, frequently receives a

"Bout twenty miles north of here. There's a bus that comes up from London on its way to Owen Sound that I have to get on."

"Well, you ever get down Dearborn way and you need a place to hang your hat . . ."

"I probably won't be in Michigan for a long time."

"All roads on this continent eventually lead to Dearborn, Michigan, boy; there's no getting around it."

"We used to go over to Detroit a lot. Saw my first strip show at the *Gaiety* on Gratiot."

"Nothing like a Motown stripper for you Canadians to spend your money on. That's what I like about Detroit; 'sgot the best broads and the cheapest priced cars in the world."

"So they say."

"Well. Guess I'll step out of this sun. 'Sbeen fine talkin'. They got any good strip joints in this Colme place?"

"There aren't even any bars."

Skip frowned. Smiled; put one foot on the step.

"To each his own, I guess. Don't forget, ever in Dearborn . . ."

Skip swung back up into the bus. He bent down at the top of the steps, waved a sloppy three-fingered salute to Ford and then disappeared.

Ford walked toward the door of the small *Shell* station which served as parcel and passenger depot for the bus line. He didn't go in, deciding rather to sit on the bench by the door. He saw the stout woman who had been on the bus with him lead her daughter to a waiting *Volkswagen* that drove off as soon as they two clambered inside. He

settler himself and instead of returning to his morning's meal, is roasted for the breakfast of some native chief and his interesting family. Canada on the contrary suffers under none of these disadvantages and annoyances. The government and consitution of the country are English; the laws are English; the climate is fine and healthy; the Indians are tolerably civilized, none of them at any rate are cannibals, and few of them are even thieves; and bowie knives are not 'the fashion' . . .

The bus stopped dead and the motor shut down. The driver jumped quickly from his seat, disappearing out the door. Ford folded up his book. Passengers started to get up, hunching over their satchels, wheezing and struggling with coats, sweaters, reaching up to the racks, shuffling into sudden line-ups, bending down to look out the windows. Ford looked at the sign on the side of the gas station building:

Clinton--Gateway to Huronia

He decided to wait out the line that had formed at the front of the bus. Skip stirred then. He slapped his hand down on top of the book on Ford's lap.

"Aren't you supposed to change busses here?" Skip asked loudly.

Ford nodded wearily and stood up. He walked slowly to the steps leading out of the bus. Skip followed close behind. The sun slammed into their eyes when they reached the pavement.

"Shee-it, it's hot out here," Skip cried. "How long you got to wait?"

"About an hour."

"Where'd you say you were going?"

"Colme."

"Where's that?"

strained to make out Skip's face in the bus window but the daylight oppressed him and his head swam. His stomach and bowels felt nauseous. What is my habit, he was thinking to himself; *floating? to let any sensation, any thought, any word, fill me? Study the surface minutely,* he told himself; *a surface study habit.* Everyone seemed to have direction around him and where he sat he felt a flat weight on him, his temples tumbling. He didn't want to move.

Finally the clatter of people dulled. Another bus came from somewhere roaring its engines like a miniature jet. The bus Skip was on pulled out to make room. Ford felt aches and pains in his arms, legs, stomach. He rubbed his eyes vigorously and sprawled on the bench, the inertia descending:

BRISTOL'S SARSAPARILLA -- established 41 years. This invaluable medicine is the original and genuine article. It has stood the test of time, and has cured diseases heretofore deemed incurable. Certificates of the most inveterate and long-standing cases of Scrofula, Cancer, Leprosy, Chronic Fever and Ague, the frightful diseases caused by Mercury, Dry Gangreen, Prolapsus Uteri, Secondary . . .

The back cover of his book was a clever reproduction of an old hand bill.

. . . Syphilis, Cutaneous affections of all kinds, Chronic Rheumatism, Liver Complaint, Erysipelas, Ulcers in the Stomach, Chronic Inflammation of the Eyes, Hip Complaint, Lupus or Nolimetangere, Tic-Douloureux, Dyspepsia, Piles, Dropsy, Pimples in the Face, Tetters, Scald Head, Pain in the Bones and Joints, Lumbago, Sore Nipples, Ring Worm -- BRISTOL'S SARSAPARILLA is a safe and certain remedy, and in some of them, the only one that can be relied on for a prompt and permanent cure.

He laughed a little and allowed the loud howl of the bus which pulled its hall of people southward to numb his ears. Now there were no busses

in front of the gas station. And in the afternoon sun he imagined the fields around Clinton as conscious creatures defending themselves *with fences in vain.*

There was bacon in Ford's brain one morning in the spring of his third year at the University of Toronto as he battered about the kitchen, his jaw palpitating and grasping gelid air in large gulps while Elaine clung like a limpet to the bathroom door, discerning that her mother had indeed already gone and that surely it must be Ford slamming the refrigerator.

"Who's in the bathroom for God's sake?" she called out.

"God has nothing to do with a full bladder," a voice called back. "It's gravity, no more, no less. On second thought, it's too much piss in one pouch."

Elaine came running to the kitchen. She discovered Ford stooping over the stove.

"Who's in the can?" she asked him.

"Never mind the goddam can; where's the bloody bacon?"

"Ford! Who's in the bathroom?"

"Colby is. Have you got the bacon?"

"No, I haven't got any bacon. Who's Colby?"

"Didn't she get some on Saturday? Christ. *Colby! There isn't any! You like Muffets?*"

"On the rocks," the voice called back,

"or with milk," it added, suddenly nearer.

Colby looked Elaine over.

"Ah, what's this? Some home stuff you've been keeping quiet?"

"My sister. With an urge to use the bathroom. You done? Elaine, Clare Colby. Col', Elaine."

"My pleasure sweet sister of Ford. The plumbing's yours. Watch the hot water tap; it talks back."

Elaine frowned freely and sidled toward the bathroom.

"Seriously, Col', you want *Muffets*. We got eggs. You want a boiled egg?"

"Frankly, I eat the inner organs of fish, beasts, and although I know it's not kosher among Christians, I dig soft roe, liver of freshly slaughtered dairy cows, hencod's come and even pig's meat at any time of the afternoon or night fried in Saflower Oil and seasoned with oregano."

"Jesus. What about now? NOW? What am I supposed to get you for breakfast now?"

"I like things that contribute directly to the losses my body has had to suffer the night before."

"Good jumping Jesus, what the *hell* am I supposed to cook for you?"

"Was that your mother who glowered at me this morning? Tell her she should shave her legs more often."

After supper the same day Katherine confronted Ford. He was washing dishes.

"I don't want you bringing people home in the middle of the night. Who was that boy?"

"A friend from school."

"Why did you let him sleep on the floor? We do have a couch."

"He prefers the floor. He's used to floors."

"He looks nervous and shifty to me. You should have some consideration. I want to know who's in my house in the middle of the night. What time did you come in?"

"I came in at four-thirty."

"Four-thirty?"

And Ford did so twice more in the same week. Although without inviting his friend to sleep there again.

Clare Colby and Loreen Cuttle lived in small separate rooms opposite each other in the same house on Palmerston Boulevard near the Italian section of Toronto.

"I've never been a serious undergraduate," Cuttle said to Ford.

They were all three lying on top of an ancient shag carpet belly down. Colby was practising his yoga breathing.

"Figure I should make that seminar?" Ford asked his companions.

"It occurs to me that you might not want to; no, I'd say that you should **not** make that seminar today," Colby answered.

Ford began to spend complete days away from home without announcement. For a long while his mother said nothing, asked nothing. Ford's absences merely occurred and passed.

"I never really understood the idea of long cocks," Cuttle claimed lying on her belly.

"Some figure the bigger the better," Colby said.

"Ascetic monks had dongs a foot long but they atrophied with time," Ford added.

"For nuns," Colby said quickly.

Colby wore the only pair of puce jodhpurs in Toronto and from his own report, the only pair in Southwestern Ontario. He and Ford had scoured the 'nearly-new' shops in *Little Italy* and had whistled up and down the lanes and alleys of Yorkville to find a pair. Colby was also

the only person Ford knew who made his living illegally.

In return for split payments for delivery, Colby would carry soft drug parcels from town to town, province to province. Ford knew of Colby's activities but did not press him for details. From time to time Colby would disappear for a few days on a run. But when he was back in Toronto he delighted in eccentric and eclectic schemes aimed at justice and clumsy socialism. From his room on Palmerston Boulevard he directed the *Canadian Literary Rectification Society*. He kept the correspondence and forms for the Society in a file next to his own folder of rejection slips, carbon copies, incomplete manuscripts. The Society's letterhead was in O.C.R. elite with a picture of Susanna Moodie on the invoice forms. *C.L.R.S.* operated strictly as a ruse, Colby explained.

"Where'd you get the idea?" Ford asked.

"It came to me during a department seminar on the influence of the land in Canadian post World War II poetry and prose," he explained.

"It's a matter of balancing the books and Libran justice," Cuttle added.

"Yeah," Colby interjected, "why not let the makers have part of the action too?"

"Writers are largely oblivious to security," Ford said.

"Nonsense, they're petrified by open-endedness. They roam around Toronto downbent, broken-hearted, underfoot martyrs, begging Canada Council grants and bragging to their friends: lookee, lookee, I'm writing a bookee!"

"The real ones are alone, quite alone; they expect very little from their societies," Ford said.

"That's where the C.L.R.S. comes in. When the loners finally experience their painful collisions with necessity."

Colby jumped up and dug through the papers on his table. He dropped two sheets on the floor in front of Ford.

275 Palmerston Blvd.,
Suite B.,
Toronto 184, Ontario.

January 11, 1969.

Professor Theodore L. Thorne,
Department of English,
University of Manitoba,
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Dear Dr. Thorne:

re: "Fiction and Game: A British Prig
in an Eskimo Court: the motif of
the Union Jack in British North
American Prose fiction." PMLA,
Autumn, 1969.

Enclosed please find our invoice setting out the amounts due in payment for words, phrases, titles, ideas, and notions used by you in your recent scholarly article on the epistolary fiction of Frances Brooke.

Payment may be made to any Canadian chartered bank in the name of the above society, or by certified cheque to the above address, or to the Secretary of State, Ottawa, Canada, on or before February 12, 1969. All payments are deposited eventually to the credit of the Canadian Literary Rectification Society which supervises a fund from which are drawn sustenance allowances for writers. Since you depend on writers for your livelihood, we're certain you will not object to being prompt with your payment. Please address any questions only to the Secretary of State or his secretary.

Sincerely yours,

Clarence W. Colby

Clarence W. Colby,
Secretary-Treasurer
[acclaimed]

cwc:lc
encl.

CANADIAN LITERARY RECTIFICATION SOCIETY
275 Palmerston Blvd.,
Suite B.,
Toronto 184, Ontario

from the office of the
Secretary-Treasurer

January 11, 1969.

Statement of Account

[this statement shows a/p
for period ending 1.1.69]

Registration Number
41671812SS University
of Manitoba, Winnipeg

<u>Account Number</u>	<u>Transit No.</u>	<u>Balance Forward</u>
01-63636548762	484B	381.22

<u>Current Items</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Code Item</u>	<u>Balance</u>
Frances Brooke	nil	13.8.69	09	200.00
[The History of			03	10.00
Emily Montague]			01	28.00
			02	39.00
			05	55.00
				<u>332.00</u>

.....

net 30 days [less 1% 15 days] 01-sentence fragment [not more than 6] 02-whole pgph. [not more than 140 words] 03-gleaned idea [not more than 2] 04-metaphors [unlimited] 05-used for scholarly paper of high quality 06-used for scholarly paper of the meticulous drudge variety 07-used for degree requirement 08-used to enhance career [@25% of salary increase commencing year of publication of article] 09-flat rate for professional development [\$200.00 levied annually for all who publish articles in professional journals, magazines, department bulletins, etc.]

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Ford rolled over on his back chuckling; he handed the sheets back up to Colby. Cuttle claimed:

"What's the point of writing about men and their experiences anyway?"

"Man is properly the *only* subject that interests man," Ford said.

"Why not write about tigers and ants?"

"We do; but we see them in human terms of course."

"*Human* terms?" Cuttle asked.

"We can see them only that way; wouldn't you say?" Colby said.

Cuttle turned over on her back too. Ford glanced down and saw how her abdomen sloped marvelously to her thighs. Her tight blue jeans were denim skin. Colby squatted down beside her.

"Well, what *is* a book?" she went on; "We're a weird species with all kinds of made things. Books are one of them. We put words which record experience onto paper which is pulp or vellum and pass them on to posterity. Books wear out though. A thousand year old book is an old book and what's a thousand years in the whole spectrum of absolute time?"

Ford considered her statement.

"It's really trees," she continued. "Trees, pulp, paper, ink, fonts, presses, binding. A man's head, his ideas, words he's assimilated, his experiences and his imagination."

"Crystalized and preserved," Ford added.

"For bibliographers to document and clump into signatures and gatherings and for academic critics to drone about," Colby added.

"Men selecting from their continuums of experience and ordering what they have selected. But books cumulatively constitute a literature

and every literature is the epitome of the nation and culture in which it has been born and has evolved. The writers are at the fore of matters intellectual, social, spiritual. We can read a civilization by looking at its covers. That's books."

"Making books is a sham, Cuttle," Colby asserted, sitting cross-legged beside her.

"But it *isn't*," Cuttle said loudly. "With books we can participate in the experiences of others, the judgments of others, the fine judgments of fine brains."

All three stared at the ceiling. Ford saw sunlight slanting through suspended dust and he traced a crack with his eyes to the wall and down to the top of the window frame. The curtains were fluffy remnants from some store garbage tin. Ideas and objects, he was thinking as he looked up.

"Then making anything is a sham!" Cuttle cried. "Where the hell does anything come from? Cars? Steel and glass and rubber and plastic. It doesn't all just bumble into being on its own; it's a deliberate and willful act of the mind. Nothing is inevitable; it's all willed, and so is a book. But a book is more spiritual. A man's experience heals his spirit in time and then he finds the strength to act on his thoughts."

"The end of a man is an action and not a thought; I agree," Colby said.

"And a book is an action, a visible and tangible product," Cuttle said.

"Right," Ford added.

Colby reached across Cuttle and shook Ford's hand.

"Well said," Ford sighed. "Out of your unwholesome head comes a pearl from time to time."

"Blame Aristotle," Colby returned.

All three lay on their backs in silence staring at the ceiling.

At the university they would lie in the grass, with autumn afternoon everywhere. Trees variegated, yet stiff, with no sign of the withered and dull sheen of leaves fallen or dangling from closed off branches. The sunlight made some of them blink in the breeze like Christmas bulbs. They were staring at the cranes on top of partly erected buildings, bare skeletons, slab on slab, grey and awkward on fouled ground. They were trying to pick out the man in the little house at the short end of the swinging arm of the crane, its wires and lines yanking and pulling at tubs of concrete, bleeps bleating across the construction site warning men below and sounding not unlike the whimpers of some mysterious primeval beast caught in the wrong century. Prefabricated concrete slabs and steel parts pulled by pulley up to the rising tower. Pushing up.

"How do those cranes get up and down?" Cuttle asked either of them.

"They must move them up floor by floor," Colby said.

"Do they?" Cuttle asked.

"Well, how do they do that?" Ford wanted to know.

"They build another stage into the tower, I suppose," Colby answered, gesturing.

"But how do they get them down?" Cuttle asked insistently.

"One dismantles the other," Ford offered.

"But how does the last one get down?" Cuttle repeated.

She pointed at the L-shaped contraption, watched it swing in arcs, in circles.

"Leave it to the experts," Colby muttered.

"No; let's not. How *do* they get them up and down?" Ford asked.

"They must add joints or stages of steel to the bottom of the crane to lift it up. And take the joints away to take them down," Cuttle suggested.

"I've never seen them taking one down," Ford said. "They must do it at night to make it all seem mysterious."

"I've seen them on top of buildings with Christmas lights on them," Colby giggled.

"We should ask a hard-hat; he'd know."

"Yes, he should."

They watched the cranes for a long time that afternoon and they watched the ant-like men scurrying about the bottom of the building feeding its growth by truck, by bucket, by sheet, by slab. Beep, beep, beep: and up went a piece. The building suddenly existing out of the ground: a mushroom, but not final.

"A transient structure," was the last thing Colby said before they went to the *Zum-Burger* for supper.

There they continued.

"I wonder how useful it is to build buildings like that one?" Cuttle asked.

"What does *useful* mean?" Ford asked.

"Useful to whom or to what and for how long is what you're asking as far as I can see," Colby explained.

"What does the work mean to the builders of the building is what you both mean by useful, don't you?" Cuttle said, sucking at a milkshake.

"It's a big square rectangle; what the hell, and it's got about as much character as a dollar bill or maybe a bank vault. It's goddam functional and nothing less," Ford said.

"Here those guys are; they're not even real builders. But they're the closest thing we've got to real builders. They're our craftsmen pouring concrete: and they aren't said to be building *it* at all. The contractor or the architect isn't even *building* it. It's the financier who'll be credited with *building* it. Building x representing y portion of revenues from year z. There aren't any *builders* any more. The last builders built log cabins. But even they built things to be functional. What's functional about a cathedral, though? We need big-time religion to get building again."

Colby and Cuttle agreed. They drifted home.

They decided one evening at Ford's suggestion to toss two damaged pumpkins from the Jane St. overpass. The pumpkins from a Cookstown grocery store were small, squat, orange. Colby chucked the first one at a *Meteor* that was throbbing down the Gardiner Expressway beneath them. It split into a thousand pieces when it hit and the driver of the car was a quarter mile down the road before he was able to determine what had whumped his hood. By that time Cuttle had hurled her pumpkin at a small *Mustang* convertible whose snout split the fruit into two and sent one of the halves into the guard-rails. The other half dispersed into clumps on the surface of the road, little fragments skidding into the wheels of other cars.

"I will make no efforts to wealth, no efforts to serious knowledge, to serious action," Colby declared later in *Dingle's*. "I want to pass the remainder of my life pleasantly and not laboriously."

"Sounds ideal, but you're no nihilist," Ford remarked, dipping a french fry into a pool of ketchup.

"It's only practical," Colby said. "At death it's annihilation, so why struggle for fame among your contemporaries, or for power over them?"

"There are any number of reasons," Cuttle said. "Starvation, cold, fear of imprisonment, sore feet from walking, hedonism, disease, malnutrition, social ostracism . . ."

"There are ways to meander through life with minimum irritation," Colby said glibly.

"But suppose you get yourself caught meandering? " Ford countered.

"You'll only know if you try it."

At Christmas they took a bus to St. Jovite, Quebec, in the Laurentians, arriving two days before New Year's. Ford did not tell his mother or his sister that he was leaving Toronto. Sixteen dollars a day for a room with two double beds at the *Grey Rocks Inn*. The Laurentians surrounded them, white, busy with skiers, snowmobilers. They snow-shoed into a small valley, built a fire, cooked wieners, made angels in the snow. Later they sat huddled together in mid-day surrounded by a field of white. Dry, straw-like plants poked through the surface of the snow here and there in the field. Cuttle ate snow, scooping it up in her red and black mittens. Colby built a small mound of snow between his legs. Ford sat behind Cuttle and she leaned back against

him. The sky was very grey, sombre, still. It began to snow eventually, large, wet flakes coming into view as they fell only when they got to be a few feet away. Cuttle blew some flakes away which had landed in Ford's eyelids.

They ran in sloppy circles throwing snowballs at each other. Colby built a medium-sized snowman and sat on its head when it was finished. Ford charged the duo like a half-back and knocked them over into the white. They were wet and cold later when they sat by the small fireplace in the room. Cuttle stripped to her underwear. The burning logs cast light puffs on the walls and floor and made the air near and warm in the rented room.

In the morning Colby got up from his bed early and turned the shower on as hot as he could stand, filled the tub, soaked for a long time, and then ran hooting thorough the door stark naked and rolled in the snow. Back inside he leaped into bed with Ford and Cuttle, pulling at their covers to warm himself, shaking with the cold, making the bed wet and miserable and confused with cries and laughter.

"Doesn't work as good as a sauna," he said.

Cuttle left for Winnipeg on New Year's Eve to visit her family. Colby and Ford waved her off at *Dorval*, watching the *CP Air* jet climb into the night. Later they took the *CN* night coach to Toronto. Ford bought two flasks of whiskey on St. Catharine Street before they boarded the train. Colby danced his perpetual dance down the centre aisle of the coach car and at midnight he howled like a Huron warrior, swallowing the last ounce from his bottle. He fell asleep against Ford's shoulder. Ford stayed awake a long time after, watching the communities of lights go by outside in the dark.

24 The idea of gathering money quickly and illegally fascinated Ford, especially since Colby had managed already to survive its vagaries unscathed for so long. Colby always used the word 'gather' when he spoke of getting money.

"The idea of work no longer fits," Colby was fond of saying. "In an economy of abundance like ours *working for a living* is a joke. What a man does is he goes out and gathers resources together from time to time. Wage helotage is no longer necessary."

That Colby gathered *illegal* money was the source of Ford's fascination. The law seemed remote. Colby's actions were risky, Ford decided, but somehow unassailable. The transfer of illicit goods among acquaintances at the university was a common phenomenon. Colby's dabbling kept him in cash and raised no major ripples, he often said. The combat with regulation was enticing to both of them.

They met B.M. at *Dingle's* at six thirty on a Thursday evening. It was dark outside, quiet and still as Southwestern Ontario January evenings must be when snow catches all the sounds and insulates them from covered ears. The snow was freshly fallen on the sidewalks and streets, not dirty brown yet or scoured by tires and feet. But by midnight the pavement would be wet black again because of the salt and tires would hiss over them as if through spring rain.

B.M. parked his Oldsmobile at the door of the restaurant-tavern and came in. He stamped his feet on Mamma's homely brown mat and before he sat down asked Ford and Colby to change sides with him so that he could watch his car from the booth. He smiled like a sad clown at the end of his request. He pulled a long red scarf from his neck and

set it neatly down beside him.

As usual, Colby's face was in motion, his brows moving up and down irregularly several times a minute, lips twisting and the teeth behind grinding at something, the familiar lump of adhesive tape weighing down one side of the frames of his glasses. His hypertension was aggravated by the affairs of the rendezvous.

B.M. was calm, paternal and kind of countenance, but Ford sensed a coldness behind his eyes. The Balloonman grinned; glanced at Colby like a boy up to naughty mischief. He unbuttoned his parka revealing a blue cotton shirt and a red bandana which circled his neck. His hair was curly black suggesting Italian origins, but his voice was falsetto and if anything, English.

"That him?" B.M. said pointing his brow at Ford.

Colby nodded.

There was a pause, expected somehow; part of a ritual Ford was beginning to discern. Neither Colby nor B.M. were making any effort to put Ford at ease or to bring him into their pattern.

Colby reached into his hip pocket, straining his shoulders because the jodhpurs were so tight. He set a small pile of bills on the table for an instant and withdrew it to his lap.

Meanwhile B.M. continued to watch his car, a grin still clamped to his jaw.

Mamma Dingle came with the cokes and Colby's fries. Ford stirred the ice chips at the top of his glass with the plastic straw.

"How much?" B.M. said when the waitress had left.

"Eighty-five," Colby answered with a question mark.

"That's good for eight dimes."

Colby nodded.

"How much do you sell them for each?" Ford asked Colby quietly.

Colby's eyes turned on him fiercely and B.M. glared across the table, a nervous frown etched in his cheeks and chin. There was another pause, longer. Ford was uncomfortable and impatient; he knew he was not an initiate and he disliked the exchanges, the private knowledge he was not part of. B.M. pulled coke through his straw, burped with pleasure, poured the ice chips into his mouth and audibly chewed them. Colby dabbed a french fry into the ice in his glass and stirred.

"With you?" Colby asked.

"M-m," B.M. grunted, shaking his head, spitting ice back into the glass.

Mamma Dingle brought the bill. B.M. tugged a folded, oily dollar from his hip pocket and made it snap with his fingers when he passed it to her. Mamma handed him a quarter.

"Yer chips've gone up, Mamma; that's a lot of scratch for oily starch," B.M. taunted.

"So are my taxes up," she replied without hesitation.

"Cough up for Oscar's campaign and he'll bring 'em down," B.M. said, his voice whining.

Ford guzzled from his coke glass. Colby was becoming impatient now too.

"Where then?" he said at B.M.

"*Shopper's World*, ten, Saturday morning."

Colby got up instantly and motioned Ford after him. They walked

through the snow talking, the mist from Colby's mouth erupting in spurts.

"When do you pay him? There?" Ford asked as they boarded the subway.

"I did."

"Under the table?" Ford asked.

Colby repeated the words.

"I *thought* so," said Ford.

Colby put his feet up on the seat adjacent theirs.

"He seems friendly," Ford began.

"He's a prick," Colby answered.

They took their boots off when they got to Ford's house. Katherine was defrosting the refrigerator; its contents scattered all over the kitchen table, counter top, fridge top. The crash of ice against the grates inside the fridge punctuated her jabs with the butter knife. She did not greet Ford and his friend. Rather,

"Your supper's in the oven."

"Hello Colby," Elaine said as she passed by in the hall.

"Salutations," Colby called back. Katherine's coldness amused him.

She was poking at the ice crusted on the small hanging freezer compartment.

"Helps'f you put a bowl of hot . . ." and Colby stopped short as she pulled a metal dish of water from the rack below the freezer and emptied it down the sink.

There was no place to sit down and no obvious way to prepare food for Colby without interfering with Katherine's operations. Ford then

cleared two places at the table, piling a mustard jar, bunch of carrots, carton of milk and the full vegetable crisper on one of the kitchen chairs.

"Figure it'll hold?" Colby said hoping to draw Ford's mother's attention.

Ford took a plate from the cupboard and divided his meal in two. Katherine watched indirectly and remained silent. Ford poured two glasses of milk, set silverware by Colby's dish, and got out some bread. He looked at his mother who was slouched into the fridge, fully aware of her quiet unfriendliness, knowing there was no direct or immediate malice from her. When he had analyzed their discord at other times he decided that it was not even a contest of authority. She seemed to resent the self-assured independence that he insisted on guarding in his daily affairs and she made him uneasy in his home when he brought acquaintances there. She had never met Cuttle. The tension was deeper than the moment's events.

On Saturday Ford and Colby were at the main entrance to the *Shopper's World* mall within a quarter hour of each other. Before his friend arrived, Ford sat on a stone bench at the back of which prospered plastic trees and remnants of the Christmas Sales extravaganzas so recently over. Coloured lights, tinsel streams and little Santa Clauses were jutting out from behind branches and the corners of windows. When Colby and Ford entered they faced a wide, long, common mezzanine on both sides of which were store facades whose signs and displays wrenched individual consumers from the passing throng who sought January clearance items, half the cost and less, compared to their pre-Christmas prices.

The place was animated with heads and legs. It was church-like in its regulation.

"The new church meeting places," Cuttle had said one afternoon at school. "Instead of worshipping God they worship the act of buying. It feels good, oooohhh to buy neat new stuff, especially to bring it home in nice shiny bags."

Women pushing baby carriages, husbands tagging behind, beside: it startled Ford that there was so much activity already on a Saturday morning. He usually slept until noon on Saturdays.

"They work all week. They should sleep in too!" he declared to Colby as they walked past kiosks with tropical plants springing out of them.

"It relaxes them to come here and look," Colby replied.

Ford was suddenly aware of the Muzak and of the benches skirting the kiosks positioned at comfortable distances all along the mall floor. Nevertheless he experienced no individuating sense of place: one of the hundreds of malls across the country. He could be at Northtown, Southtown, Easttown, Westtown, Crosstown, Downtown, Uptown, Parkdale, Glendale, Riverdale, Bay Ridges, Oak Ridges, Maple Ridges, Caledonia, and on and on. They were meeting B.M. here: that was something distinct.

They passed many different kinds of stores as they walked: sports, shoe, record, furniture, book, card and candle, hardware, specialized boutique, teen, liquor, candy, ice cream, newsstand. Colby went first when they spotted B.M. Ford stayed at the newsstand and leafed through *Newsweek* magazine. Colby returned promptly, popcorn box open. He did

not look at Ford or acknowledge him, but passed by on his way out of the mall. Then Ford headed for the Balloonman's cart. He felt no tension.

B.M. was near the water fountain which marked the middle of the mall, five nozzles at different heights spraying water toward the ceiling behind him. The jets of water fell back into themselves collecting in a multi-levelled square, tiled pool. Ford saw copper-coloured pennies and the silver faces of dimes and nickles at the bottom of the pool: flicked there by the wishers.

In the winter B.M. peddled his candy cart products up and down the mall floors of a dozen plazas all over Toronto. By special license, he explained to those who might ask, he moved from mall to mall by weekend. Some twins in frilly pink dresses stretched against his cart peering at the heap of popcorn on the other side of the glass case; candy apples, red and round, in a row along one side. At one end of the case a small gas jet and a rack for the tiny tub which held the popcorn kernels which exploded into white puffs constantly. At intervals B.M. would ring the bell on his handlebar. The little girls reached greedily for the candy apples B.M. held in his hand while their mother paid.

Ford walked up to the cart casually. B.M. pretended not to know him: another customer. Ford asked for a box of popcorn and B.M. reached into his case. Ford gave him thirty-five cents, accepted the box, opened it immediately as Colby had instructed. He plunged his hand deep into the warm fluffs and quickly felt the first plastic bag.

"I'd like a helium balloon too," Ford added unexpectedly.

B.M. was surprised, but untied one and handed it to Ford.

"A green one. I don't like red."

B.M. frowned, seemed nervous suddenly. He tied the red balloon back to the handlebar and untied a green one.

"Fifty," he said.

Ford dropped two quarters into B.M.'s palm and walked off down the mall, popcorn box in one hand, green helium-filled balloon in the other.

Later Colby pulled at the balloon string playfully.

"What'd he say?"

"Nothing. He sold it to me; that's all."

Colby laughed, almost slipping on the snow-packed sidewalk. He made a snowball and winged it at the balloon. It pompfed, straightened itself.

Ford let it go at the corner of Bloor and Yonge. They watched it spring skyward, at first quickly, then more gradually. Dangling its string pathetically after. Moving up at an angle, like a rocket might. Getting carried by the wind, getting smaller. Losing its colour. Finally, buildings obscuring their view of it. It had turned grey with height. Getting darker as it headed northwest. And smaller.

Colby's gait in tune with some unheard music. They forgot about the balloon in the sky and tossed snowballs at icicles hanging from eavestroughs on the three-storey houses on St. George and did not speculate about the balloon.

"It'll explode," Ford said. "It's very cold up there."

They left the popcorn boxes at Colby's room and knocked to see if Cuttle was back from Winnipeg yet. They hadn't seen her since the trip

to St. Jovite. No answer. They went to *Dingle's* to eat and spent the remainder of the afternoon together watching a triple-feature at the *Odeon Downtowner*. When they came out it was dark.

Neon lights on Yonge Street are brighter in winter cold. The night traffic hadn't begun yet as they walked all the way to Palmerston Boulevard. Ford was aware of the excitement growing in him. He felt that he was moving toward the quick of something, toward some irreversible experience. He watched nervously as Colby put the plastic bags, all eight packages, inside his six string guitar and then put the guitar into its case.

"Does he always deal hashish in popcorn boxes?"

"First time. Depends on his pick-up," Colby answered.

"Is there much danger of us getting stopped?"

"Some. You'll feel it if it gets tense."

Ford strained to keep up with his friend's near-run on the stairs leading down to the Bloor subway ramp. They went west. In the subway train Ford would not ask Colby what their destination was nor about their mission. The lights inside the car flickered to the click-clack of the steel wheels on the tracks below. They transferred to a street car at Dufferin, but Ford soon lost track of the stops and turns. For a few minutes he examined every man around them as a welling paranoia grew like a giant bubble in his belly.

They came to a poorly lit street with very little traffic but with cars parked in a tight line along one side. The mood of the block was indolent, the air supine and dark. Colby turned into a three storey house and scrambled up the stairs to the verandah. He

fidgeted with the door knob, scuttled along the hallway and up another flight of stairs: music, voices, shuffling sounds came from somewhere back in the house. In the hall Ford's nervousness subsided. He gave himself over to the rapid flow of events, letting the dark tangle of movement and sound impinge on him. He realized that he felt secure by trusting in Colby's experience. Images of some R.C.M.P. man lurking behind a door flashed into his mind but in the next instant seemed ludicrous and the arbitrary and omnipotent feelers of the law receded and were remote from the moment.

"Wait and watch," Colby suddenly said without turning around.

Ford was alarmed but unquestioning. Watch for what? And if a what comes along what then? he was asking himself. He sat on the stairs and a door opened behind him. With it, a flood of light and sudden loud music. There followed a spate of images and sounds for Ford, fleeting, unencumbered by any tension: Colby muttering something, shadows on the stairwell, the door closing, Ford feeling excluded from what was happening behind the door. He was an outsider looking out, looking in, on a film-screen of people doing. He sat still in the dark of the hall intensely alert to the shapes he saw: alternating grey and black on the wall, slants of light from street lamps illuminating the bottom three steps. While behind the door Colby broke the law, the dark and shadows of the hallway settled in on Ford like molasses. He fought an impulse to move, to keep mobile, to not stop and be caught in the act. The law, he thought, needs to focus in order to accuse; it needs to see clearly in order to threaten; it needs to fit actions into categories. Each minute made him more vulnerable. He wanted Colby to run

out of the building with him.

Colby came suddenly, closing the door behind him, walking abruptly down the stairs.

"I was just inside the door all the time," Colby explained as they walked hurriedly down the street. "What's the matter? You afraid of the dark?"

"I didn't like getting left out there. I would have liked to see how you did it. Do they know you? How do they know it's good?"

"They know me. They took it all. How's that for a fast fifty?" Colby sang, evading Ford's questions, waving his guitar case into the air, kicking snow up.

"You only made fifty dollars?"

"I made fifty. You made fifty. We made a hundred."

"That's not much for the risk."

"What risk?"

"They could trap you during one of your transactions."

"They rely more on squealers and enemies of B.M.'s than on surveillance, Ford. Don't overestimate a narc's intelligence."

"I've never met one. That is a fast way to pick up money, though. But I'd like to know more about how you make contacts with buyers. How can they trust you?"

"It takes time. There are ways to meander through life with minimum irritation. Just tag along and watch," Colby said.

They walked less quickly now but still the tension persisted in Ford. He felt that by participating in the illicit sale he had penetrated to the core of an act. While Colby had been in the apartment

Ford had to let every fragment of time pass consciously through him; had to consider the experience in its progress. It was the perception, fleeting, of unencumbered participation in some fundamental, basic action; something universal, not unlike the sensation he had experienced when making unhalting, private love with Cuttle for the first time. He laughed to himself. He knew that he and Cuttle were not new in their love and he knew that he and Colby were not new in their felicitous dealing: yet he felt privately amused and fascinated by the dabbling with laws and taboos so clear in their categories, so obscure and remote from immediate experience, so obviously derivative in their custom and precedence. Not the defiance, but the indifference intrigued him. He knew that they were unique in their actions, he and Cuttle, he and Colby: unique in their private experience.

Colby passed the fifty dollars into Ford's hand: food for Ford's contentions. No complications and yet, potentially many; and cumbersome. He had not even seen the buyers. There was no anguish for him, no labouring under immediate fears of detection and punishment. He accepted the money boldly and actually felt a right to it, felt power over it; seraphic, the money was, in its magic masculine grace: he felt insouciant, indifferent. His society's walking-working laws and presumptions about condonable attitudes and activities were remote appendages to his daily, self-possessed habits. If he was reckless, it was a neutral nonchalance. He burned to tell someone besides Colby about the independence he felt but he knew the sensation would pass and he suspected that it was independence that was false, actually a vague alienation. Nevertheless, he relished the moment, the surface of his

quiet belligerence.

They went to *Dingle's* again and ate fast fried foods quickly. The decision to go to the bars on Queen Street was spontaneous.

Colby tilted back draughts ready and willing to celebrate their coup. Ford thought it ironic but not unexpected that after having just completed a sale of first-class hashish Colby would slug back beer instead of finding privacy somewhere to toké and titillate. As always, Colby never pressed him to smoke up, to suck in the sweet smoke from a hot roach butt, to draw deep the curls of mind-singing smoke from a tiny lump of smouldering hashish. Beer or smoke: it was all the same to Clare. He had a sense of time and place with his friend and they would chug beer in a cheap hotel and snicker at the dollies and their greaser guys whose Elvis Presley duck-ass hair-do's shone from the smoke-screened lights on the ceiling. Clare could do that and be content for the moment.

A honky western band whimpered on the stage, two tight-lipped male singers locked into boring versions of what seemed to Ford to be the same vague chortling ballad. Their music pleased the mixed audience of yapping beer drinkers. The lead singers moved their fingers in G and C chords while a brylcream bass wandered the standard runs on his elaborate *Fender*. A drummer tinkled and thumped while the smoke, mist and talk drawled grimly around him. A patter-clap at the end of their song, fast-clip words into the microphone by the leader, a run of chord progressions, and suddenly they were gone.

The waiters were mute, abrupt, bored: their taciturnity irritated Ford. He tipped their waiter, first one dollar, then two, then three.

The man's curtness persisted. There were waitresses as well, in buttock-tight shorts and halter-tops. Old deck hands grabbed at the girls as they went by with their trays and fists full of dollars. The waitresses endured the slaps and verbal abuse, spitting back curses from time to time. Colby and Ford sat silent through their first rounds of beer, watching.

As always in beer parlours Ford could feel the moist and raw electricity of sex lurking at every table. Women in pairs and fours, seldom alone, sighing sex in corners, in slacks and hair-sprayed heads. Men in work clothes, willing to copulate with a snake should one curl up appropriately, eyed the females, postponing any daring overture or contact.

"I'm not sure I could do that all the time like you," Ford said finally to Colby.

"Why not?"

"Surely you'd get marked after a while. The cops must watch."

"B.M.'s never in the same place twice. He's certainly not my only source. Once he used balloons. Shit, can you imagine? Balloons?"

Ford laughed lightly.

"I'm inclined to satiety," he said.

"Satiety?"

"I'd like a glut of cash all at once if I had the chance. Fifty bucks? It might as well have been five thousand or five million for the same risk, don't you think?"

"Surfeit, baby, and you get stung. Take a little from time to time and nobody gets hurt. It's an economy of abundance; some of us are

happy just ticking off little scores. B.M.'s ambitious. You're ambitious. Me, I'm lazy. You'll cloy yourself by grabbing at too much. Then you end by having to invest, then you gotta protect, then you can't resist. Then you can't really say or feel you're indifferent or free."

"I like power. But power costs, you figure?"

"What do you want power for?" Colby asked.

"To stay independent. Those bastards out there want to slot me. You gotta fight them."

"Horseshit. If one does not *successfully* resist, it follows that effectively, one consents. Fight the good fight Ford. Me, I'll wander through my days nicely, playing my guitar, slipping in and out of libraries and fairies."

"I'm sure you will. I want to be indifferent too. But it's a committment to live that way, as much to, as not to. Can't you see that it's a committment?" Ford drummed his fingers on the table.

"The universe tolerates a man through indifference; that's all. So I expect nothing and I demand only what won't cost me too much. Now, my eyes have been opened. I don't want to hurt anybody, use anybody. I know I am naked."

Colby covered his eyes with his palms.

"Make thee an ark of gopher wood, then," Ford laughed, almost chanting. "And pitch it to the four winds and wait for the apocalypse. You can be Cain if you like. I'll be Abel."

"As long as you Abels keep your sheep shit out of my garden, if I'm to be the tiller man. And while you're at it, order us some more beer."

Colby laughed knowing he had stretched the allusion ridiculously.

"I don't think I'll have any more, Col'; I think I'll split. I'm pretty zonked."

"It's *early*," Colby said above the din.

Ford shrugged.

"Maybe Cuttle'll be back tomorrow," Ford said.

Colby nodded.

Ford pulled on his coat. The tavern door closed quietly behind him, snuffing out the guitars and voices. Cold January air cooled him immediately. He pulled his toque down and turned up the collar of his coat, squinting as he walked out into the blowing snow. Warm cars coasted by, always seeming shinier to him in the cold at night, their occupants relaxed and warm as they moved past shop-jammed Queen and Yonge. Near *Eaton's* he stepped down the subway stairs. Warm air blew up into his face.

The train zipped him northward toward Summerhill Ave and home. There were few people in the car: an old man with a cane, white bristled jaw, heavy brown coat, unbuckled galoshes like stumps at the ends of his legs. A seat full of teenagers on their way somewhere. Even the voices of those in the car seemed hushed. The wheels clanked in muffled thuds, a susurrations of the machinery.

He came up to the street again, the wind less rigorous away from the tall-buildinged blocks and vacuums of downtown. On Summerhill Ave there was a wind purling snow along little curb dunes. The crunch under his feet dominated. Alone in the grey-white street. The moon small, vivid, but not radiant in the city sky at night: contributing

one shadow of the two cast by a stodgy black maple on a lawn; the other shadow formed by a street lamp. Scintilla of snow flakes like fireflies suddenly in a perspective across a lawn of undisturbed white. The snow, trees, houses, a chiaroscuro of phantoms for Ford: a harmony of cold and warm. Light flooding from a front window, glimpses of seated people, television-grey, ghouls in their houses.

At his house, farther on, darkness. He went around to the back door, found it open and stepped inside quietly. He set his boots on the plastic mat and walked up the short flight of stairs to the kitchen. It was warm and his cheeks tingled. He felt suddenly exhausted, body and brain ready for sleep. He switched on the kitchen light: ten-thirty.

"Elaine?" his mother's voice calling from the living room.

"No, just me," he answered, clicking on the hall light.

He hesitated to move toward the living room where he had intended to sprawl on the big sofa for a while before making the effort to scour his teeth with dental floss and undress for bed. He was in the hall when she cried out again:

"Don't come in here!"

Her cry didn't register at once. He was at the entrance to the room.

"Keep out! Keep out!" she cried.

Ford was looking into the room before her distressed commands shattered his lassitude. The images were abrupt, their import radically unexpected. He had wondered on occasion about Sebastian and his mother, about what erotic and sexual thrusts they might make in

dark, secret places. But the unforeseen contingency of coming upon them: Sebastian pulling at his trousers which were clumped at his ankles; bending awkwardly from the couch to get them up, a half-on prophylactic sheath stark in the light from the hall dangling from the end of his penis: the sack beneath, black-brown. His mother holding a rumpled brassiere to her breasts, half-standing, the thicket of black hair at her crotch, the silhouette of her hips and thighs, the roll of flesh at her belly -- and the last flash before he fled, her eyes fiery, light bolting from them, her mouth half-open; Sebastian bending down, his back naked and round.

Ford sat on his bed to catch his breath, to deliberate the shock. Absurdly, he was aware, he found himself laughing. He touched the back of his front teeth with the tip of his tongue. He was aware in shafts of clarity what had actually transpired; but his understanding clogged from minute to minute. He suffered an impulse to turn on the light and look at himself in the mirror, to see if indeed he harboured a latent laugh or a lapsed laugh about what he had seen.

"She was *fucking* on the couch," he mumbled to himself.

"Old Coop's been balling her on the couch," he said in a whisper.

The laughter rose in him. He suppressed it. Then he was overwhelmed by a suffocating regret for having penetrated his mother's privacy, for having come upon her basically, for having such knowledge.

"Good for her!" was his next impulse.

He heard them walking down the hall and got up to follow. Before turning into the kitchen, Sebastian caught sight of Ford. Sebastian's face was bunched up to one side as if a megrin headache had clamped his

head. Ford stepped into the kitchen. Katherine was clothed now but Ford's eyes fell to her abdomen automatically. She knew it. She collapsed into a chair, heaped into it by confusion and shame, prostrated by Ford's second appearance. She looked at Sebastian who had sat down to tie up his shoes. Katherine threw her arm against her knee. It flopped there. Her whole body seemed gripped by a moral ataxia. Sebastian looked at her, then at Ford. He blew air through his nose, gestured a *c'est la vie*.

"Kathy," he said softly.

She wiggled her head, closed her eyes.

"I guess I'll go," Ford said, turning around.

"No, no, stay," Sebastian called to him.

"Kathy!" he continued, now loudly. "Kathy," softly; "it's all right, it's all right."

Katherine looked up at her son, her eyes wide and red.

"Kathy, it doesn't matter. What does it matter?" Sebastian said.

Ford turned to go again.

"Ford," Sebastian said gently, getting up, reaching for him.

"Does it shock you?"

Ford shook his head; there was a smile there. Sebastian's hand was on his arm.

"I'm sorry I came home so early. I usually don't," Ford said calmly.

There was a silence; Ford walked slowly out of the kitchen.

He lay back on his bed in the dark. He could hear his mother and Sebastian talking, their voices wordless, sounds in another room. A

long time afterward Elaine came home with a boyfriend, her voice chirping greetings. They went to the living room. Then the sound of the back door closing and locking: Katherine shutting off the kitchen light. She said nothing to Elaine and her friend. The toilet flushed, the sink ran. There were only the sounds of the late movie after Katherine's bedroom door closed quietly.

Ford sat outside the bus depot thinking about journey cakes. Local traffic scuttled by: some cars zipped in for gas; a diesel's air brakes whooshed. He was hungry for journey cakes of the sort customarily baked on wood stoves by pioneer wives in preparation for a trip to town to barter eggs and sacks of grain; or to make more festive the journey to and from a crossroads church on Sunday. Made from whole wheat flour and baked by the heat from red hot hardwood. The impulse endured as he sat there, until he thought of finding a bakery, of buying a half-dozen donuts and stuffing himself on the wood bench along the front window of the gas station exactly in the late afternoon sun, five o'clock high and still merciless through blue skies. Besides journey cakes, crusty and sweetened with maple syrup and honey, there would have to be natural spring or stream clean water to wash them down. As it was, all Ford could taste was the elastic and dull film of whiskey in his mouth from the swigs he had taken out of Skip's bottle. The gas station attendant rushed past him carrying a quart can of oil. A green Camaro pulled up to the pumps with four young men inside, the back window plugged with towels, books, cameras, kleenex boxes; and at the rear side windows, clothes on hangers. "LOW30" the attendant said. The hood flew up and two men bent over the fuliginous cavity underneath. Oil, glinting in the sunlight, streamed from the can to the funnel to the car's engine. The hood slammed. The attendant scurried for change and the green car was gone. Where it had been, now an empty patch of pavement blotched with garage-stains of grease and gas, tacky and hot in the sun. The car's absence made Ford impatient. He went inside to

the small office and selected a chair from the four near the counter.

After a minute he pulled out the brochure he had stuck in his book back at the Toronto bus station. He didn't want to read beyond the first few lines:

*The Huron County Museum is located in
Goderich. It houses . . .*

and then he opened his book near the front:

GREAT BARGAIN IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT. That valuable property, containing 206 acres of choice land, situated on both sides of the River Maitland, at the junction of the east and north branches of that river. Twenty acres on the margin of the east branch are laid out by survey as the town-plot of Clinton; sixty acres have been cleared, and are under good cultivation, and well-fenced. The remaining 126 acres are covered with valuable white oak and walnut timber. Any party wishing to enter into a general business connected with the lumber trade, would find this location one of the best in America for such purposes. The whole or part of the property will be sold a great bargain.

The attendant came in.

"What time for the Colme bus?" Ford said wearily, wanting to explain his presence.

Along one wall there was a set of Greyhound travel brochures and Shell highway maps and down the front of the cash register, Chargex, Bankamericard, Diners Club, American Express symbols in a neat vertical row.

"Five-fifty," the attendant said.

Ford got up and reached for a highway map of Southwestern Ontario; and spread it out on the counter. Highways, township roads, concession sideroads: all chequering the land off in neat blocks around Clinton and

Colme. Ford imagined the first sleigh track cut through the *Huron Tract* and remembered that the inevitable purr of progress had turned it into a toll road a few years later.

"Ten cents," Hezekiah Helps, toll-master at Belgrave, would say. "Ten cents per vehicle for Her Majesty's coffers."

In 1829 there were three families in the *Queen's Bush*, and no roads. Ford imagined himself walking through the mass of hardwood forest on his way to a Colme homestead site of the sort his mother's grandfather found after he snowshoed in from Guelph in 1864.

From the window of the cool waiting room there were no trees to be seen; only store fronts and the profiles of passing automobiles. Five-fifteen. He started to fold the map up but had trouble restoring it to its former creases. He decided to walk around in the town looking for a bakery, decided to walk out of the town, dreading the hot half-hour wait at the pathetic, muggy depot, vaguely intending to thumb a diesel down and make his way alone to Colme. He found the bakery and then remembered that he had no money left. Only twenty miles, independently of that distant bus, he thought when he stepped out into the street again. His decision was abrupt, conceived in front of the *Royal Hotel* and executed immediately in plodding steps north and toward Colme. He would beat the bus to town and be at Elizabeth's house by six, he calculated. He was determined to move, to defy the bus schedule, to beat it if he could, but his legs and hips were increasingly exhausted block by block until the town's buildings had larger and larger spaces between them and he could see out into the fenced fields which allowed maple, elm, pine, hemlock, oak

trees to act as breakwinds for forage, market garden corn, wheat, oats. The fields stretched away from the highway until they ended in small woodlots or plush growth along creeks. They stretched in the different August colours of cultivated crops. Even summer fallow had its growth, green and yellow. Ford's fatigue grew. He saw the first adumbrations of late afternoon sun splayed by trees at the edge of town. Suddenly his impromptu walk threatened him and he thought of a neutral seat on the bus for twenty-five minutes to Colme. But a breeze coming from a field of maize, not jarring, made him think of the neutral air in the bus: the picture-postcard flash of land from tinted windows. His impetus slowed, nevertheless, diminishing toward retreat. About five thirty-five, his watch showed. Yet, no disposition to make the move backward. Demurring and diffident he turned around sluggishly to observe the cars moving up the highway. The first avoided his thumb by swerving across the centre line into the opposite lane, unnecessarily, to register contempt; or fear perhaps.

Ford suddenly wanted to walk it all, to taste the dust, smell the green, feel the temperature slowly dribble down: the humidity sticky and heavy. He asked himself why he must hurry and asked himself why he must ride, twenty miles, twenty miles, collapse, collapse in some green field. Another car zipped past. Ford's eyes were on the driver's. No decrease in speed. Passed. They watched each other. Another car. Another. A pick-up truck chugging and smoking. Passed. Leaving a band of noxious fumes to settle along the side of the road, pernicious ghosts to choke Ford, the flowers, the grass, the trees.

He walked a way and stopped to skip a stone on the road. Then he

used his book as a bat to send another stone sailing. In the ditch where the stone finally landed he saw a continuous spread of bottles, paper, odds and ends of plastic containers and other garbage flung from cars and tractors.

A car came behind him and he turned around in time to see its driver sneak a glance. Then silence. Five-forty. It occurred to him that he might flag the bus down as it came by. He felt less vulnerable, almost indifferent, amused that he fretted over such a short journey, surprised at the way he allowed his whim to skim him along the road home alone. He walked on until the click of his leather soles against the gravel on the shoulder of the road was clear and distinct, almost the only sound. When cars were not moving past, their rubber tires turning like endless whining tracks, he could also hear birds in the trees and fields. He could hear wind and see it flipping leaves in maples by the road. Grass, long, mixed with timothy, clustered around fence posts, barbed wire for a bit, knots of points at intervals to keep the cows in or out; Ford was not sure.

A gopher poked his snout out from a hidden hole in the grass on the farmer's side of the fence which ran parallel to the road. Ford stopped to watch and they started a staring contest. The gopher stretched taller, pursed his paws, obstinate but guarded. Ford saw him clearly but knew that the gopher could not look back for long into the bright western sky. I'm a show to him, Ford thought, turning his head toward the sun which was less yellow now and soon would become an orange red ball bleeding away in glows across the evening sky. When he looked back, the gopher was gone. But there were birds skirting the

field and landing on the telephone and hydro wires. They flitted after each other disappearing into bushes and tree branches. From where Ford walked on the road it seemed playful life in the trees and fields nearby. Whether the gopher and the birds were asserting their territories or not, the game, the game, was audible, visual.

He stepped off the gravel onto the solid pavement and the heat hung and pressed at his eyes and forehead like a pair of tight glasses. He burped sour gas from his stomach, felt nauseated, tired, thirsty.

Another car hummed in the distance. He turned to hitch but it passed by. The woman on the passenger's side turned her head only slightly to look at Ford who stood by her way. And then the act of hitching seemed like a game to him: *red rover, won't you pull over?* Five forty-five.

He came to the first farmer's lane and saw the familiar rectangular mail box, silver, dented, turned sideways to indicate empty. The centennial farm emblem boasting that the land had been cleared over a century earlier was attached to the post at the head of the gravel lane leading to a house and barn. In front of the two storey red brick house: lilac bushes not in bloom, maples tall, untouched splinters of former hardwood density; surrounded by power-mowed grass and well-kept flower gardens. There was a collie yelping near the house, looking Ford's way willfully and guarding tractors, barnfulls of hay and timothy, silos full of corn for dairy cattle dotting the back forty. Ford thought of the cattle dropping dung by day along the banks of creeks whose meanderings had by now been chartered, altered, and added to, no longer being elements to be taken for granted and prayed at.

He walked slowly and suffered the gnaw of a thirst not quite tormenting. He suppressed the yawn in his bowels that pressed everything in there up and out. Sat down under an elm a few feet off the road beside the fence.

Like all other elms in the land it was dying of the European disease. Once a favourite tree for logs to build houses because of the quality of its wood and its straight, easily-trimmed growing habits. For fun: slippery elm, the inside bark of the soft elm good to chew on; peeled in spring and hung on beams to dry, a pioneer gum. For health: slippery elm bark tonic. He sat under it: a tree forty or fifty years old; small as trim elms go. The grey and dry open parts on the bark reminded him of his father's probable wounds, gaping and grotesque for embalmers to hide. He swatted a mosquito against his bare arm and deftly picked up the tiny corpse and dropped it by the base of the trunk. He would have ignored the murder further except that a red ant immediately stumbled across the dead mosquito, executed what must have been a jig, promptly hoisted the ample lump of bug meat into the air, and proceeded to carry it off in erratic fits and starts over stones, blades of grass and fallen twigs. Ford decided that ant stomachs must be impossibly small and that the carcass would constitute a feast at least. He got on his hands and knees to watch the ant's relentless progress, all its legs flying, the dead stinger clamped in surly, iron jaws. For an instant it disappeared under a clump of grass and then emerged without its prize, retraced its steps, somewhat inconsistently, back toward the general area of the first conquest. Ford lifted the grass blades, roots, dirt: udnerneath a megalopolis of activity. Scores of ants racing

about at fantastical clips through tiny channels speckled with white eggs.

Another female mosquito poked her proboscis into Ford's arm. The sudden ting of pain angered him. He crushed her flat and a little blob of blood gushed from her belly. He dropped the second carcass in the way of the red ant which pinched and poked at the corpse from both sides, eventually scrambling over it and proceeding up the trunk of the elm tree, empty-jawed.

"Fickle bug," Ford muttered aloud, tiring of the game, but very aware of the ferocity of life at one-quarter inch and under. How much havoc a plow blade made, he thought: apocalypse for the local ant population, their tunnels and egg holds upturned and lost. Like men, though, ants on all the land near Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, Ford thought; and recalled ants high in the Laurentians, in houses, immeasurably prolific; more abundant than men. Mindlessly industrious, black and red.

"Hey mack, you all right?" a high voice from the road.

Ford jumped around with a startled twist, still on all fours. An old car with a dented rear fender had stopped on the shoulder.

"O.K.," Ford stuttered. "I'm fine. Just, just looking at bugs."

"Eh?" one fellow with a baseball cap on his head called back.

"Bugs; I'm watching bugs!" Ford called out.

The passenger door opened. He was short and fat, thick thighs and a bowled belly hanging against a big belt buckle. He walked toward Ford quivering like a quidnunc. The driver got out his side.

"Is he okay?" the second man called to his fat companion, then

ambled around the front of the old sedan.

Ford stood up, feeling incoherent, annoyed that these men had crashed against his privacy; he did not want to explain himself. The plump man in the brown baseball cap decided that the man on his knees was not ill; and now considered lunacy briefly, or some sort of aberration warranting their curiosity or concern. He examined Ford visually. Ford brushed dirt and dead grass and twigs from his pants as he stood fully up.

"You all right?" baseball cap said again.

"Yes, yes. I was hitching; got watching a bug crawling up that elm."

The driver reached them.

"He was watching a bug."

"A bug?"

The driver was in overalls with a large red polka dot handkerchief stuffed in the front pocket.

"A bug," Ford repeated.

"Mn?"

"I was watching an ant crawl up this trunk." Ford pointed at the trunk.

"What are you doing out here all alone?" the man in overalls said. Mid-twenties, Ford decided; red-brown tan; skin healthy-seeming, shiny.

"I was watching an ant crawl up this trunk," Ford pointed.

"He means besides that," the baseball cap interjected.

"Hitch-hiking."

"Oh! Thumbing through?"

Ford wanted to be silent, not to have to meet their expectations.

"Where to?" the young farmer in blue-grey overalls asked.

"Colme for a few days."

"Visiting?"

"Yes."

"We're goin' up west of Blyth. Can take you that far."

Ford was happy for the ride.

"We figured you was hurt," the baseball cap man said a few minutes later in the car.

Ford smiled politely from the back seat. An oily ball-peen hammer stuck out from the tool box on the back seat beside him. There was an empty Marvelube oil can on the floor: used and reused. A smell of machinery and grease on the grimy upholstery.

"Yeah, Lorne here says, hey Murray, that guy there looks like he's had a stroke, keeled over or something."

"No," Ford chuckled politely, the sudden change in momentum, in direction, in conversation, in thought: racing him.

"You live up this way?" Lorne asked, glancing back a second from the steering wheel.

"No; Toronto."

The plump baseball cap man, Murray, turned on the radio:

*. . . the same yesterday, today and tomorrow!
Jeeesus Christ! Friends, He can be your strength
and your insurance for salvation! The Son of the
Living God who shed His precious life-blood on
the cross that we, WE undeserving sinners might
live in eternal bliss with Him in Heaven. Yes,
isn't it wonderful friends: may God grant you
the joy that comes in knowing Him as your per-
sonal Saviour. And may He bless you with all
the good and wonderful things He holds in . . .*

"Christ, change it!" Lorne barked at his friend.

The car was old, the front window in two parts, a metallic figurine like the nose of a jet attached to the front-centre of the hood. Underneath them was the low growl of an old muffler. Big pearly knobs on the radio dials and on the end of the column-gear-shift:

High 85, low 55 overnight. Scattered showers tomorrow afternoon. Good possibility of thunderstorm activity during the night; no hail report. Winds easterly 15, barometer 30 and falling; NX panorama news next on 920.

There are three! three locations in Huron now to serve you. Your friendly IGA grocer is Ferren Iver in Colme, Garnet Tish in Goderich and Colin Fingland in Clinton. Specials this week: two pounds baby-beef liver only one-nineteen! Aunt Jemima 2 lb. pancake mix only . . .

"Passing through?" Murray asked.

"Visiting."

"Folks in Colme?"

"Yes."

"I'm Murray Shiell; this here's Lorne Scott."

"Ford."

"Ford? You mean like in the car?"

"Yes."

"Last name?" Lorne finally asked.

"Giffen."

"Giffen? You relation to old Ern, the Purina traveller?"

"Yes."

"You goin' to the funeral then, eh?"

"Yes."

"Too bad 'bout ol' Ern. He your Uncle?"

"No."

"Ern did a good job for Purina; hustled their stuff for every dairy farm'n Huron-Bruce. Good man."

"Do you farm?" Ford asked glumly.

Ford was aware of the growing tension; he was not reciprocating.

"Shiell there's doing a lot of contract-out stuff this year. He's got brooder-hens, hatched thirty-thousand last year, eh Murr?"

Murray geared down to pick up speed, dropped into third as he passed the truck that had chugged and smoked past Ford earlier.

"Some of the farmers are bulldozin' the tops of their hills and draining their flats. Some are tearin' out fence bottoms, puttin' up new buildings; repairin' and redecoratin' old ones. A fella can make a buck if he's got a cat." Murray drove intently forward as he spoke.

"Shiell's got the only free cat 'round this township; so he'll do little jobs the big companies won't touch. Costs them too much to haul their cats to the site."

Blyth came into view, snugly denting into two hills after a slow bend in the road.

"We'll be topping off the knoll bottom end of Gerrit Beimer's place; third concession. He's plugging up a marsh; wants a squash and melon patch in there."

There was a long silence now. The car finally moaned to a stop after turning left onto the Auburn Road.

"What about the frogs?" Ford asked as the car pulled up on the

shoulder.

"What frogs?" Lorne replied.

Ford looked toward the highway heading north. It seemed to him so lazily straight and functional, the prospect of walking on it again so soon obtunding him into the back seat.

"The frogs that live in the marsh," he said getting out of the car. "The frogs you're going to bury for your goddam squash patch," he cried, waving them away, not waiting for a response.

The old car dug up gravel as it took off, the tires squawking slightly when they hit pavement. Ford walked to the road heading north and paced slowly into the familiar town. He looked for a coke sign to find water, passed the BP garage, walked on to a restaurant and again remembered that he had no money left. The Chinese owner reluctantly gave him a glass of lukewarm water. Ford was savouring it when he heard the bus's engines throbbing by. He set the glass on a table and ran out to the street hoping the bus would stop to load or unload someone or something. It did neither. He ran desperately up the street, a block, two, but the bus disappeared noisily over a hill and reappeared soundlessly most of a mile farther along. He slowed to a panting walk, exasperated that his impatience in Clinton had so inconvenienced him. Still breathing heavily he turned about to see if any cars were coming. One was slowing up in front of the Post Office.

He walked along the town's main street until it turned into highway again; buildings fizzling into fenceposts. Fields sprawled like wings away from the road. No cars passed. The wind through the oats growing nearby sounded like a gentle water stream. They swayed, all together,

bending to the air, still greenish-yellow. He suffered an impulse to spring into the green and yellow and roll there. The sun seemed less intense now. Three cars went by in quick succession.

"I should be thumbing," he said aloud to himself.

Far across a field to the west, into the sun, a tractor, and farmer, plodding across Ford's perspective, only shadows. He remembered his question about the frogs. Why so thorough? he asked himself. Where: the hardwood forests, damp and thick; the little lakes as reservoirs; bears and wolves and fox in scores; and pigeons nesting in oak trees? It was all so neatly patterned off, so efficient and final in its service to the first beast. Yet even tame, the oats were wild to him; sometimes wrenching one way and then another with the vagaries of the wind. The shadow of the tractor and driver continued to move across the far field and the impulse in Ford to move off the road into the green became stronger. And then, he marvelled at how long it had been since Jarry's telegram in the morning, how far he had come since sleeping, how little and unspecific his thoughts about the impending funeral; the last meeting with old Ern, Purina pusher for Huron-Bruce; the weariness in his legs reaching his arms, no cars coming in either direction. He suddenly realized that he had left his book on the back seat of the bulldozer driver's car: *Pre-Confederation Canada: An Eclectic Anthology*.

In Toronto straw had been arranged in long lines, each as wide as five feet, up and down both sides of the street. The night before, charcoal had been set afire on top to keep the pavement underneath thawed for excavation the next morning. In the January cold puddles formed from melted snow in hollows at the curbsides. They had splintered up and air pockets were white blotches underneath: Ford stepped on one. The crinkle sound pleased him. There was a damp, hanging odor of wet black wood over the street. Big flakes of snow were falling heavily. When he arrived in front of her house, Cuttle came bounding down the steps and jumped into his arms. He embraced her, his gloved hands firm on her back which he could easily feel under the flimsy cotton kimona. She huddled close to him.

"I was gettin my mail," she said, pulling the blue kimona tighter around her. She shivered; her slippers were snow-covered.

"I saw you on the sidewalk," she added, stepping through the door.

Inside, Cuttle bent down to pick up the mail from a small table at the bottom of the stairs. One of her breasts hung out suddenly as she leafed through the letters. Her kimona came apart more and Ford caught a glimpse of the blonde pubic hair, a puff beneath her belly; and her navel like a sunken button on a silk couch cushion. She tore open one envelope and started back up the stairs pensively.

"When did you get back?" Ford asked, deflated; the excitement of the prance through the snow, the hug, faded; sudden and gone.

"I *failed* Canadian History!" she cried, stopping on the stairwell.

Their one class together: *Canadian History 430*.

"What'll you do?" Ford asked. It was no surprise to him.

"No supp either!" she cried. "Shit!" and flung the letter down the stairs.

"What'll you do?" Ford repeated.

"Nya," she giggled, darting up the stairs ahead of him.

He followed her into the room.

"Colby in?" he asked. "I called but he never answers in the morning."

She shook her head, peeled off her kimona and sat cross-legged on the bed apparently deep in thought.

"My old man'll shit; he'll have a coronary," she said, reaching down to her suitcase beside the bed.

"Do him good," she added, flicking the snaps.

Ford didn't reply.

Cuttle stood up and dug about in the unpacked case. She drew out panties and brassiere pulling them on between phrases.

"You know he got his LL.B. in two years flat after a B.A.? Imagine. Four years: B.A., LL.B. Just like THAT! So I'm farting around with a General B.A. in History and Sociology because there's nothing else to do in that regard. I mean, you don't want me to be in Pre-Dents or something do you? Here, clasp this thing. Damned brassieres. My tits weren't so big I'd throw this thing out. Ever seen an African nigger broad's breasts after she's old and had ten kids? Hang down to her guts."

She said it all in one breath. Ford fastened the clips and she wiggled herself comfortable. Then she pulled on a pair of faded blue jeans while he watched her intently.

"They don't brush their teeth over there either, do they?" she announced.

"Maybe the chew on roots like the Canadian Indians did."

"You believe all that business about licorice root cleaning the scum off your teeth?"

"Indians never had dentists."

"They didn't eat sugar."

"The pioneers didn't have toothpaste; they chewed on roots too. Black cherry bark, taraxacum, vervain, licorice root. It was like candy to them," Ford said.

"Why do they have half-courses anyway?" Cuttle moaned, picking up a comb to order her dishevelled hair. "Take your coat off, stupid," she bellowed teasingly. "No chance to get your teeth into anything in a half-course. It's one of those stupid Americanizations."

Ford tossed his overcoat to the chair by Cuttle's cluttered desk.

"Maybe you should have done some work," he said half-seriously.

"Prick," she whispered at him.

"Well, whaddayou expect? You don't work, you don't pass."

"One measely essay on stupid Governor Grimes I don't get in and he blows a hairy fit and flunks me."

"Graves; John Graves Simcoe."

"Graves, Grimes. Who cares? What a bore! Are you going to tell me you weren't asleep in those lectures listening to him drawl with that obnoxious Michigan accent?"

"When you were there I was busy trying to see down your blouse," Ford said.

"Well that's worth something; a good tit in the morning can wake a guy up. But a lecture on the political history of the town of York? What good does that do a girl? Good Lord!"

She was feeding a wide bead belt through the loops of her jeans.

"Colby came and jerked off one morning right there in the lecture hall," she said matter-of-factly, fastening the buckle.

"Crap," Ford laughed.

"No, he *did*. He told me he'd blow his rocks all over the proceedings. So I dared him and he came with me to the Wednesday ten lecture and pulled off right onto the guy's chair in front of him."

"What'd the guy do?"

"Nothing."

"What did Colby do?"

"Went back to sleep like the rest of us."

Cuttle yanked a blue sweater over her shoulders. She pulled it neatly down so that it covered the belt and then she scampered around the room looking for her shoes.

"Where was I when all this happened?" Ford asked.

"Didn't know you then; you were probably there."

"Didn't anybody else see him doing it?"

"Sure; they pretended he wasn't."

"What did you do?"

"I watched."

"And?"

"What are you, a voyeurist or something?"

"I still don't believe it."

"Well, ask him if you don't believe me."

"I will."

"How was your trip? How's Winnipeg?" Ford asked in the next breath, sitting down on the bed.

"Winnipeg's a sanctimonious ice-box at New Year's. We all went swimming at this guy's indoor pool."

"Fun?"

"I nearly drowned for God's sake. We were doing up and drinking gin and eating brownies."

She spoke quickly. Ford always felt uneasy with her exuberance. He wished he could plant himself mulishly in front of her, hold her steadily with two hands, and make her look right into his face. She found her shoes nose down in the waste basket by the desk.

"You eaten?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"Tea?"

"O.K."

They moved to the common kitchen at the end of the hall.

"What did you do in Winnipeg for so long?" he asked.

Cuttle crashed and bashed around the kitchen looking for her breakfast. She pulled a giant-size box of *Special K* from the cupboard and set it down in front of Ford. She tilted her head back and took a swallow of the milk she found in the fridge; stuck her tongue out and wrinkled her nose.

"Think it'll kill me?" she said, handing the wax carton to Ford.

He sniffed at the opening.

"Taste it for God's sake!" her muffled voice coming from deep inside the cupboard above the counter.

"It'll be all right," Ford said without tasting it.

"No damned canned fruit around here," she boomed.

"Eh?"

"I want fruit: peaches, pears, *something* with my cereal."

She stood on a chair and searched the top shelves.

"Prune plums!" she cried, holding the can in front of her. She tossed the tin to Ford in the next instant. He caught it just in time.

"Damn. Now I've got to piss," she stammered, 'scooting from the kitchen.

The image of her body lunging around the corner: an afterglow of movement. Ford remembered her in a yellow bikini running in short steps, arms extended for balance, down a steep hill at Sandy Banks Provincial Park in Prince Edward County, and plunging into the waves in spite of the layers of dead fish, big-eyed and silver-bellied, rocking like a thick syrup along the shore, in and out by wave, by wave; she coming back out with goosebumps on her arms and thighs, her suit sticking to every character and curve of her body, running half-naked on the hills behind the beach and Ford chasing her: they rolled and ran up the enormous dunes, digging their feet sideways to keep their balance, squatting at the top to watch the lake, blue-grey, whitecaps in the wind dancing for miles in both directions. And he remembered her squatting in warm summer rain on Kew Beach at night, the noise of Toronto traffic curiously mixed with the waves and wind. She was peeing through her short pants because she could not wait: and marvelling at the substances

that came from her body, embarrassing Ford with accounts of blood and warm urine. In the rain her hair stuck to her forehead, blond and thick, her body so important to her, hearing music to dance to in the blanching, crashing water, turning the stars and glows of city night skies into festivals: a desperate picaresque of the frenetic activity below.

"I'm a process," she had explained to Fort in Hart House Cafeteria at lunch. "My cells and eggs are part of a closed system. The purpose of my life is to show the world purpose and meaning. History whispers to me that I am Earth's purpose, I am life being aware of itself. I'm aware, you see. Even a pimple is interesting, wouldn't you agree?"

"I suppose so."

"Ever wanted to look at a squeezed blackhead under a microscope?"

"No; the idea never occurred to me."

"I did, and *did*. And the junk that grows in that white stuff; yech! we're walking hosts for a billion bugs. Nature produces such an incredible variety of phenomena from a mere hundred-odd elements; the world is actually a huge laboratory where all kinds of combinations are there to dazzle us."

Cuttle had invited Ford home for tea after class one afternoon and he met Clare Colby for the first time. Cuttle and Colby wanted to be known and called by their last names.

"Loreen sounds like the name for a shampoo," she explained.

Colby and Cuttle bantered endlessly about abstract and complex subjects.

"I sometimes experience an invincible disgust with life," Colby

would declare.

"Then the only solution is suicide," Cuttle would answer.

"Suicide is a sleep and a forgetting," Colby quoted.

At first Ford seldom participated in the exchanges which endured, often breaking off at one point and hours later starting up again.

"Anexoria is a sign of latent suicide, especially among children and young adults."

"What's *anexoria*?" Ford had asked.

Colby looked back at him blankly.

"Lack of interest in food," Cuttle answered.

They challenged each other with fundamental problems.

"Why is not immortality more obvious if it exists? Why do we have to grope in the dark and look for proofs and in spite of the burning desire for immortality, be reduced to mere conjectures?"

"Modern man doesn't face death anymore," Ford said. "He's left with a mere rational knowledge of it; death is remote from his experience."

While Ford listened, Colby talked one day about the accidental collocations of atoms and the way the universe was unwinding toward entropy. Ford gradually participated more and more in the exchanges.

Colby was older, a dropped-out graduate student. He had walls of books in his room: mostly used paperbacks and unreturned University of Toronto library books. He also had elaborate files: notes, clippings from magazines, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets; material for his short stories and novels, his unfinished manuscripts.

Cuttle re-appeared in the kitchen. She plugged in the kettle,

poured out a heaping bowl of cereal, scooped out two teaspoons of sugar.. She held them suspended above the bowl, tilting the spoon gradually, watching the granules plummet to the flakes below.

"Like snow," she said. "Here! Open it!" she pointed to the tin of prune plums.

Ford used the can opener which was attached to the wall above the stove. He had to lean awkwardly over the steaming kettle to reach it.

"Who put this thing way up here?" he said, cranking clumsily at the handle.

"Colby; who else? He's the only one tall enough to reach it."

"Figures," Ford said, setting the tin by her bowl.

They met often for lunch; and Ford went often to Palmerston Boulevard to be with them. Colby and Cuttle danced back and forth between their rooms like lovers. But as his penetration into their lives grew, Ford began to understand their unhesitant and unspoken respect for each other's privacy, for each other's particular rhythms of life.

Ford soon learned of Colby's homosexuality. To Ford, this made Colby's relationship with Cuttle all the more intriguing. Colby was explicit but not overpowering or contemptuous. On one occasion he had hugged Ford to himself, pressing his cheeks against Ford's head. Ford did not resist immediately; showed no shock or anger. He allowed the embrace and then looked up negatively.

"I wasn't sure," Colby said, embarrassed to be rejected, but not threatened or angry.

Colby often invited Ford to go to the *St. Charles* on Yonge Street to meet and mingle with 'all kinds of gays'. For the most part, though,

their gropings to understand each other were verbal.

"You guys do it all in your heads," Cuttle complained, turning up her nose. Ford and Colby had been talking about sexuality.

"It seems to me that you're afraid of communion with women," Ford was saying, ignoring Cuttle who sat across from them making miniature explosions in her milkshake. "You don't want any maternal brides," Ford said, looking directly at his friend.

"I'm afraid of what the communion means," Colby confessed. "It means mingling with the flux of birth and death too directly. I'm a profligate rebel; if I don't participate, I assert myself. If I do participate, if I take a woman, at any time, I condemn myself to accept the established world. I want to be impersonal; I want to create my own world; I don't want to be limited and defined by sex. I don't want to feel resolved."

Ford resented the niceties of explanation that emerged in conversation. Colby, who usually felt warm and comfortable with his friends when he wasn't trying to explain or outline his life, usually got nervous and furtive as such conversations lengthened. He wanted to let his attitudes and needs flow, uninterrupted by any intrusions of expectations. But first you need collaboration, time with others, Ford always said to him.

"I don't need to account for *myself*," Cuttle explained to them both.

"Nor I," Colby asserted. "I don't like explaining either. After the first five times it bores me and vexes me to have to bare it all; I loathe having to mould myself into some sort of malleable-nice-person. I want to move in a continuum that's pleasant, open-ended, and not inun-

dated by clods who need time and experience to meet me at my real self."

"But to meet the real you takes time, takes give, takes take; takes collaboration," Ford said. "Time to grow through experiences together. Time to grow through ideas."

"There are no guarantees," Colby added. "And in the end, you've got only yourself. Your single, pure self. I want to love; I want to yield; but I want myself, alone and able to be alone. Unresolved."

"But you don't have to be alone," Cuttle chimed.

"Nevertheless I am, often; and I need to get used to it, wouldn't you say? It isn't easy to find people."

"Our culture's got lots of gathering devices, but no mechanisms for real contact," Ford said.

"Mechanism? You don't prearrange relationships like you prearrange assembly lines. Relationships occur, people merge, diverge, they pass through each other's continuums; and sometimes they flow together for a while. Sometimes it gets desperate," Colby said.

"What a metaphor! Flow, flow! All kinds of goo-bound intensity. It's too much in your heads," Cuttle declared. "Get from the idea to the act."

Ford and Cuttle made love for the first time one early afternoon when Colby was in Fort Erie on a delivery run for B.M. Usually Colby slunk in and out of Toronto on his assignments vaguely informing his friends, usually not. Ford was often apprehensive. Cuttle also worried about him; but not to the extent Ford did. They were walking home from the university in November comparing their concern.

"When he runs low on money this guy B.M. fixes him up with a

delivery. Col's slick as a vacuum cleaner salesman; he's never been caught yet."

"There are other ways to get money," Cuttle said.

"But why labour in an economy of abundance?"

"I see he's convinced you too."

"What's to convince?" Ford answered. "We produce far more than we can rightly or easily consume. So ol' Col' lives on the leftovers. I have to build food displays for ten hours on a weekend to earn what he gets sometimes in five minutes."

"Who's the we?" Cuttle cried. "You say 'than we can rightly or easily consume'. You aren't on some assembly line putting tops on cans of beans. The we is pretty vague isn't it? The mindless ones who live blissfully ignorant of their helotage? The ones who spend twenty years clawing up and down debts and distractions for some kind of tenuous hold on security? You can see the shrivelled youth in their faces. They plow up a place in the productive economy and plant themselves there. You'd hate them. They bore, they indulge, they bumble through life and wretch every time something or someone upsets what they figure to be their final and best of all possible worlds. They're just shadows lurking around and *ftt!* they're extinguished. They don't know where they've been or even *if* they've been."

Ford and Cuttle stopped in at *Dingle's* for hot chocolate and donuts. Cuttle played a Beatle album: *Magical Mystery Tour* for 50¢ on the juke box. She savoured her chocolate, playing delicately with the mallow which floated in thick cream on the top. Ford brushed over her hand with the tips of his fingers and she smiled back at him. Outside,

raw and sloppy November snow and wind wound around the buildings making eddies. It was comfortable and quiet to be out of it, looking on. When they left the restaurant they ran most of the way to Palmerston. Cuttle tried to wash Ford's face with snow. He subdued her, pushing her into a bank that had been shovelled chest high beside the sidewalk. She was prostrate there until he helped her up. She made an angel on someone's lawn and didn't stop to brush off the snow and in her room she pulled off snowy boots, put them toe-down into the waste basket, hung her coat on the back of the door overtop Ford's. They sank into a kiss and settled down onto the floor, hard and cool against their skin. Cuttle was deliberate and patient, sighing and breathing freely, absorbing the pleasure of Ford's hands and lips on her shoulders and thighs, sinking back into the titillation and deliciousness of the loving, letting it happen directly.

The impulse to seal and secure their passion was a recurrent torment for Ford. He backed away in the ensuing weeks. Although he wanted to guarantee their relationship he knew that Cuttle would resist any exclusiveness. And when he was with her, the idea of living together, even of some distant marriage, seemed like a clumsy, unsatisfying bondage to him. Yet the nagging need to make her admit to what he thought was their particular and special union persisted and persisted in him.

"Of love? But it's a relationship. And that suffices for us, wouldn't you agree?" Cuttle asked thorough her mouthful of french fries and ketchup.

"How can there be a growing relationship between a man and a woman

if there are no promises to protect that relationship from the world until their bond is strong enough?" he replied.

He spoke with a faint smile on his face. Cuttle might know these truths she expounded, Ford thought; *if they were truths*. He understood what they meant; but he did not feel them.

"Ford, Ford. Can't you see? I'm saying that we can *relate*, sometimes with a kind of love, sometimes not. The relationship endures, but differently, at different times. Everything changes. Love doesn't always have to be constant. And it's not necessary in a relationship that there constantly be love."

Ford's surface response to Cuttle's overt rejection of any kind of protracted coupling was to avoid showing his reliance on her for emotional and sexual energies, even though he focussed on her, wanted her exclusively. She desired and openly insisted on a further extension for her life: to be accessible and integral in her openness to all others, not to the point of a flagrant promiscuity, but admitting the potential for a life that was on-going. She wanted to break down the social and legal entanglements, the expectations and blind presumptions of the popular institution. The potential must be there for her to survive energetically, she said several times to Ford; and not to be dead woman alive: eminently buriable.

It pained him when she was warm and affectionate with others at the university or downtown on pub nights. He would watch her hugging someone, twittering in a corner, and he would feel awkwardly possessive. He wanted an easy sign or symbol to declare: *Loreen Cuttle is having an exclusive relationship with Ford Giffen -- HANDS OFF!!*

During these weeks Cuttle somehow convinced the appropriate administrators that she should be allowed to repeat the course she had failed. Ford agreed to help her put together the required research paper which had been her stumbling block the previous term. He watched her gradually assume a control over the work, and as they laboured together he slowly accepted her demand for a careful distance in their connection.

As they studied research materials in the library, he studied her. At first he had to be a catalyst, sometimes provoking her into careful procedures of research. He showed her how to use the library effectively and it pleased him to watch her enthusiasm grow. They would meet at the reading room to scan indexes, to speed-read scholarly articles; he was her expert and enjoyed the role.

"Here's one ol' Col' should invoice for *CLRS*," Ford whispered.

"Fort Detroit and Windsor-Sandwich: A Tale of Two Cities."

As the primary and secondary research began to gather itself into a theme, Cuttle's interest and momentum grew.

"There is real beauty in scholarship," she exclaimed to Ford at the checkout desk. "Cautious and patient working through the facts to find a truth."

"Real scholarship is a lifetime task, not an essay's worth," he had answered.

Eventually the piece of work was her own. The writing of the first draft was underway.

Part of Cuttle's research had involved an analysis of homestead land still available in Canada.

"I'm amazed at all that land," she said. "Look here at northern

Ontario. A belt of arable land big enough to swallow up twice the population of Toronto on ten acre plots each."

"We should homestead," Ford said.

"Too hard, too long," Cuttle answered.

"It's true you can't be in a hurry; but the idea of building my own home, my own life in the wilderness, entices me. The point is that I'd have to rely on myself; I wouldn't be able to call on an expert. There'd be me, the land and my needs and I'd have to meet those needs or perish."

"Or leave and come back to the city," Cuttle added.

He brought topographical maps to her room and showed her what he had been contemplating.

"There's good land north of The Pas in Manitoba too," she said.

But it would take more than an unclear affinity for the land; to want to homestead involved a vision, a lifestyle, resolution, Colby warned them.

"We should just go and *do* it; all of us!" Cuttle said finally.

Colby smirked cruelly when they explained their idea. He ridiculed what he called their naive enthusiasm.

"You'll bust your back," he said. "Just to run a quarter section of land? Why do you want to own land? Nobody really owns anything. Or is it the actual working of the land that appeals to you two? You get to clear out two hundred acres of poplars and pines, cut 'em down flat, haul 'em away, burn 'em out! No sweet land, that. Get power over your land, then plant wheat and corn. Cains of the earth, you two. You want to wrestle with the elements again?"

"What kind of future is there in the city? It's a monotonous rat race just to keep alive. I want to experience a guts-deep will to life. I'm sick of the puny struggle to exist in the city. It's measley and fretful; it's a surrogate struggle. I want to feel I've won. I want to feel alive!" Ford said.

"There's nothing to win," Colby replied grimly.

"There *is*. *There's my unique individuality.*"

"Aha! Here we have the titanically striving individual. Better watch out for getting to feel too *individual*. A real individual has more to fear from life because he realizes what death means. Go ahead, have your unique existence, but don't expect Cuttle to keep up. The bubble'll bust; she's a spoiled brat, I hate to tell you. She knows it too. She says she abhors her father's way of living but she sucks on his lifestyle all the same. She takes pills to keep the babies down. She gets upset and goes full force to make up for failing a university course. She'd be one lousy pioneer and so would you, Ford."

"You just love being the queen bee, don't you Colby?" Cuttle sneered. "You love boring your friends with your personally won wisdom, don't you? You enjoy being depended on for the real, hard facts!"

Ford interrupted. He wanted to stifle their confrontation before it matured.

"What am I to do then?" he asked sarcastically. "Make a career? Work at some job making cars or televisions? Or maybe I should teach school or take ten years off to set up in some profession like law? How about dealing dope? Should I deal dope all my life? Subserviate the best hours of the day, the almighty ticking-away day, to a meaningless

exercise?"

"Dabble," Colby replied quietly.

"You can't *dabble* on the land," Cuttle said; "if you want to draw a living only from the land and not depend on the spin-off from the factories."

"You can float around in our social system in a way that was impossible before this century. There's a lot of pie in the sky for everyone," Colby lectured.

"Now who's naive?" Ford countered. "I hate the city; it makes me feel like an automaton and you're telling me to float around in it?"

"You make yourself a robot! And don't think the countryside's any sweeter. Fuck! Go ahead! Hoe ten rows of corn an acre long and say you're not a machine, or clean chicken shit out of brooder pens and say you're not a machine. Better still, dump a ton of worm-kill on your potatoes, fight the bugs, the rain, the sun, the soil; without being methodical and profit-oriented. You want to keep a vegetable garden? that's another matter. You want to homestead and farm, get ready for marketing boards, fluctuating prices, warbled cows and federal ceilings and quotas on the stuff you grow. They'll even tell you how much land you have to clear in a year. It's insidious; there's no unique individuality on the land, in the land. There's land; there's you; there's also your one chance, your life, to touch what you are in the here, the now. There's no time to homestead anymore. It used to be one way to find out; not any more. If you want to be alive."

Colby had devastated them. He added calmly.

"There's a devil in the forest: old operatic Mephistopheles. And if you want the grand secret to bliss on earth, he'll tell you you have to wring the earth until she bleeds to get the answers you want."

"I don't want a surrogate heaven on earth," Ford cried. "I don't expect it; it would bore me."

"If you want a life which is just a means for sustaining the self, you can have it. Me, I want a life as an end-in-itself," Colby declared.

"Maybe Canada's the only country on the whole globe where it really is possible still to build up a home and a life directly connected to the land," said Ford.

"You're pipe-dreaming," Colby muttered.

"It's the *directness*, Colby, the undifferentiated one to one connection with *land* . . ."

"What's *land*? What is it?"

"Space! Room for things to grow, for things to support each other."

"It doesn't stay that way."

"Why can't it?"

"Because sooner or later you'll get the upper hand and then it's not mutual. It's exploitation."

"Exploitation?"

"It's a word; it fits. The point is simply: if you don't subdue territory for yourself and those who are alive at the same time you are then *they'll* subdue it and you too. You want nice sweet land? Romantic soft land with flowing vines? There isn't any; not any more. There never was, probably."

"I think there was and is," Ford replied.

Colby didn't answer. The conversation had ended.

Later Ford went home sullen, fast-flying February snow at first just ticking his face as he walked. Soon though, the little pin pricks of cold stabbed repeatedly. The wind was streaking snow in lines across the shafts of light that dropped into small drifts congregating around the street lamps. It was a relief to descend to the subway, warm gusts of air rising to meet him on the stairs. But the wind and snow seemed more merciless when he came back up to the street again. He bent into the wind and cold, his mind on the conversation with Colby about land. While he walked he wished for the warmth of his bedroom. He let the conflicting aspects of the idea about homesteading stream into his head.

To Colby the idea had been a gorgeous bubble, with nothing at its centre. In a vague way Ford knew that it was possible to survive simply and solely on a section of land. His mother's grandfather had homesteaded in Colme, his grandfather had farmed in Colme; but Ford also knew that inevitably any development bred more development. The Colme farms were now complex business enterprises. Many smaller operations had folded and merged into large corporations. He smiled when he thought of the words he was using: *operation, corporation, enterprise . . .* And non-development made homesteading impossible: no government agency would long tolerate simple squatting. A conflagration of fiery wills wanting roads, bridges and cash crops would roar from the cities across the hills -- *MAKE THE LAND SERVE US !*

It seemed futile to yearn for some basic agrarian society. Ford kicked at the snow as he walked. He had not accepted his friend's at-

tack as being any final word on the subject. Perhaps Colby's judgments are right for now, Ford thought. Still, he feared to find Colby out; to find *him* also unsure, also suffering from the malaise of the frontierless generation. In one breath Ford could say, there's nothing to do but patch up what's left. In another he could say that the trek to the frontier must now be a journey to a more direct experience of life: where the taboos against unpredictable living might no longer survive; where there might arise a reborn trust in the land and in its habits, a living environment where people might learn again to have communion.

Ford remembered the Maitland River swelling into dangerous flood every spring and slowly dropping to a trickle in spots by the end of the summer. The feeder streams and creeks would dry up by August, but farmers in Huron knew that the water would return the next spring: their knowledge based on Department of Agriculture watershed grids and not on an intuitive trust. Should the streams fail, there were blueprints for an elaborate irrigation system on file somewhere which would tap Lake Huron to make nature work even when she wouldn't on her own.

Ford turned into his street. The wind blasted snow against the cars parked in plugged up driveways and only the hardwood trees seemed sturdy and indifferent to the cold. Just a few more minutes to warmth. He thought of his great grandfather scrabbling through the *Huron Tract* in a cutter, his thick hide blankets wrapped like onion skins around him. Ford did not want to idealize the rigour and pain of frontier life, of basic agrarian life, but it frightened and enraged him that there was no hopeful life left, no way of living that was not already inundated by the passionate and principled terror of not having control

over things. He felt that being on the land didn't always have to involve a man's pitting himself against it like a general. Ford knew that he wanted life on the land that was homogeneous; where all things locked into all other things, and there was co-operation.

The snow and the sharp cold were real details in his thoughts, as vivid and urgent as the unfinished and frustrating conversation with Colby and Cuttle. On the subway he had wondered what process of will might requite his urgent needs, but all jobs available to him, so far as he knew, tinkled and rang in forecast like the frenetic darting of ants in the grand productive economy. Even the university churned and chortled, cranking out workers. All he had been told and taught pushed him to want to incarnate his will by a continuing labour against the indifferent and inhuman universe. But he wanted the land to be his metaphor for a vital process of living; even now the land was a career, life-term, a function in the economic scheme of the mass-producers. He felt that for him there was no land. All of it seemed tied up in surveyed, calculated clumps. No sweet land or life left for a man to pitch and toss and tumble with. Everywhere around Toronto things sticking up out of the ground. Everywhere, steel and concrete growth. No land with bugs and plants and birds and rocks and unknown watersheds.

Punctuating his deliberations, however, was the piercing cold of the snow storm he was walking against; and he knew there was no accidental or naturally occurring defense against such cold and wind. He wanted to reach home and be warm. For there to be a home which was warm he knew there must be a will which made men masters of the cold times. But with that conclusion came another: there could be no peace when his

will or any man's will was absolute and final on the land. Sooner or later the upper hand, Colby had said. Sooner or later the plants would be screaming, howling at the scour, scratching species. All at once he wanted a special place, magically, and he would protect it like a private hunting ground; from others, from himself.

There was relief and even a little gratitude in him when he got to the door. The first rush of warm air was friendly and enticing. He quickly entered; found Elaine propped on the floor against the couch where his mother and Sebastian sat. They were all watching television. Ford was glad for the warm and lazy mood of the room.

"You're early," Elaine said, not looking up.

Ford didn't answer. He looked toward the couch and collapsed into the arm chair.

"Hlo' Ford," Sebastian said. "Don't see too much of you around here anymore."

"He might as well live over there," Katherine remarked coldly.

"Where?" Ford answered back abruptly.

"With those two from the university," she said.

Ford didn't reply. He knew his mother was contentious tonight, that she wanted to assert her disapproval in front of Sebastian: to strike out at Ford's stubborn independence, to express again her dissatisfaction with his friends, with what she described as his listless, drifting habits.

"Why don't you ever bring them over here?" Elaine asked.

"They wouldn't like it here," Ford replied, becoming belligerent, wishing he hadn't decided to come home early. The present conversation

clashed with the warmth and quiet he had found when he first came in. He imagined Cuttle and Colby at Fern Rommel's house where they said they were going. He imagined them listening to albums, smoking, drinking, relaxing; no sudden tensions. He wished he were there.

"I've got an essay to do," he said. But he didn't feel like doing even that. The conversation about land had saddened him. A malaise like thick tar had dribbled over him as he had walked home. If there were no specifically individual choices possible, he thought, then life must reduce itself to a fidgeting nervousness: choiceless, predetermined, futile, fickle, with even the insecurity of death explained away.

"Why wouldn't they like it here? We not good enough for your friends?" Elaine whined.

"That's enough you two!" Katherine said sternly.

Why must she imagine disputes? Ford was thinking.

"The trouble is that there never *is* enough," he said, aware that he was poking the coals.

"Of what?" Elaine cried, turning away from the television.

"Of noise, of plans, of people, of ideas. This place is nugatory, neutral, a limbo; none of you does anything."

Ford was getting worked up; he straightened himself in the chair.

"What would you recommend?" Sebastian said pleasantly, edging in to temper the conversation. Over the months he had come to feel relaxed in Katherine's home and accepted as given the privileges of familiarity.

"Anything! Take her to Niagara Falls! Find Elaine a husband! Move in here and quit pussyfooting around! Anything."

Katherine's face went rage-red. She stood up crying at white heat:

"Why do you come here? Move in with your filthy friends why don't you? Just don't bring your vulgar talk around here!"

"I've said nothing vulgar," Ford replied defiantly.

Suddenly he regretted his thrusts and wanted to withdraw, to retreat to his bedroom. He looked at Sebastian who sat politely on the couch and who was reaching up to restrain Katherine.

"Leave be!" she yelled at him, pulling her arm away. "He's not going to come here and cause trouble every time he pleases."

"I'm not causing trouble," Ford said.

"What do you call this?" she asked, waving her arm.

"I call it nothing."

He felt useless; got up and left the room. Heard Katherine's voice a few moments later; then Sebastian's, then Katherine's.

"Why do you defend him?" she was demanding.

Ford walked back into the living room determined to pacify them.

"Look, I'm sorry. I apologize for upsetting you."

"You didn't upset anyone," Sebastian said. "Kathy, you shouldn't get so riled so fast."

"Why don't you just go and live over there if they're so much more interesting for you?" Katherine said, ignoring Sebastian's coaxing.

"Perhaps I should leave you people be," Ford said quietly as he turned again.

Elaine scrutinized all from the floor. She did not understand why Ford forced every contact among them to its crisis. She hated him when he did.

In late March he came mincing and prancing into his room with Cuttle and Ford.

"I fail to see the humour," he said.

"Be courageous," Ford replied sarcastically.

"I still fail to see the humour."

"You must learn to live without appeal and to get along with what you have. But in this case you needed more. Personally, I think it's good that you had to depend on us to help you," Ford said.

"Don Jail's a grim damn place," Colby scowled. He paused, then added: "There's a certain cosmic insignificance to the whole adventure. I kept asking myself in there: will I vanish like a bubble? Eternity, thou pleasing, dreadful thought, make me a bubble and I'll pop out through the square bars to the street to disappear again into anonymity. I mean, what did they really care, really? I was merely my body to those cops. Man is his body. With my body's disintegration my conscious personality ends: presto, their interest in me ends and I can leave that damn dungeon."

"I would have been trying every angle to get out of there," Ford interjected. "Why did you wait so long to call? Maybe we could have gone bail."

"I mean they've got this fantastic passion for organization," Colby continued; "up at seven, shit at seven-o-five, brush your teeth at seven-o-six; put your shoes on seven-o-seven, fart seven-o-eight . . ."

"You should have called B.M. to get you out," Cuttle said.

"I am a man who must live without any religious or metaphysical

consolations, but I do not run to my freinds until I have to." Colby was angry and condescending. "So I had a choice: six months or two-fifty."

"I wouldn't have thought you'd get caught," Ford remarked.

"Who got caught for fuck sake?" Colby growled. "First I was without guns or goods as the saying goes. Second, they find one lousy joint in my flight bag. A youthful indiscretion. It's a MacDonald rolled. That's good for possession of the Queen's tobacco. What do I get? The strap for smoking in class? A fine, maybe?"

"You still should have called B.M. to get you out. He got you in," Cuttle said.

"B.M. doesn't know me if I get stopped."

"Supposing we hadn't been able to get the bloody fine together? What would you have done then?" Cuttle asked him.

"You did; that's that."

Colby went to the kitchen. He returned with a milk carton and a handful of bread slices.

"You begrudge me my freedom Loreen? You ever been in a goddam jail?" He was drinking from the carton, the milk dribbling through the corners of his mouth.

"Not yet," she answered.

"First they stick this guy's hand with a glove on it up your ass: 'Find anything interesting?' I ask him. Then they sit you naked on a wood bench and grill you. All you do is count the blocks in the wall and trace the run of the old steam pipes along the ceiling while your voice repeats and repeats the same answers:

'Do you often do decoys for B.M.?' one of them asks me.

'Who's B.M.?' I answer.

'Comeon' punk, you think we're blind we don't know you've been running for him for months?'

'Mn?'

'Don't get smart!'

'It's not a question of intelligence,' I tell them; 'it's a question of the most aggravating boredom. I want a charge and I want a call.'

'There'll be no calls,' they tell me.

'CAN I quote you?' I answer this guy.

'No calls. Don't get lippy.'

'No calls yet is what you mean. Right?'

'Smart guy.'

'After a fashion.'

Biff on the chin. He hits me using the back of his fist between the knuckles and the wrist. He's smart, the red-faced fat one. Whop on the shoulder -- he does it again.

'Don't bruise me fella.'

Whap on the back of the head.

I'm so recalcitrant they get mad. I'm studying the room, doing my best to ignore how serious they think they are. It's really civilized in there: radiators, bare bulbs. Even a coat rack, and a telephone.

'Why were you in Calgary?'

'I like the old fashioned Bay building there.'

'Why were you in Calgary fella?'

'I wanted to preview the Stampede.'

'Who were you supposed to meet there?'

'Wally Bennet.'

Bip, whack, sock! They're getting mad. It hurts when they hit me, so I get mad too. I know they know they've blown it; I mean, there they are at the airport like self-important priests in the wrong century. They nab me and I'm not even off the fucken tarmac. They drive me to the Don Jail. 'Why here?' I ask them. They don't talk to me at all. They're really mad when they figure it out."

"Figure what out?" Cuttle asked.

"I'm not the delivery boy."

"Who was?" Ford wanted to know.

"How the hell should I know?"

"Didn't B.M. tell you what you were supposed to be doing?" Cuttle demanded.

"I got to Lethbridge and nobody showed. So I went through the motions. Only those guys must have figured I was making a pretty big score. Me, I'm more interested in how goddam cold it is out there for March. They've got this small airport, planes in and out of California all the time. Only they're very angry. I'm clean; whoever B.M. really wanted to get through got through I guess because I know the pickup was in Alberta somewhere. They guy probably got through by dogsled. They tell me I'm booked on possession. One lousy goddam joint."

Ford and Cuttle had imagined Colby in a small cell, beltless, bootless and battered.

"How long have you been there?" Cuttle had said to him when he finally called the day of his hearing. "We couldn't figure out where you'd gotten to in the past two weeks."

"Crown Prosecutor says it'll likely be a fine; two-fifty or three because my record's clean."

They scurried to their banks to raise the money and arrived at the jail long after the hearing had been conducted.

"He says I've been suspected of trafficking. I tell him that presumptuousness doesn't become the fine heritage of English common law. He acknowledges that I seem too cocky for my own good. I tell him there's no way he could ever begin to understand what my 'good' is. Then he gets a little mad and says 'two years probation and two hundred and fifty bucks'. He's enlightened for an old lawyer. Lawyers are usually muddied behind the eyes but this guy sort of chuckles when I say I haven't got the money. 'Then six months' he says. Can I have a few hours to make contact with friends to get the money, I ask him. He says I have to remain in custody till it's paid. Then I ask him what happens to people who don't have any friends do they have to stay in jail or do they get a chance to raise the money? He says my question is irrelevant and he's busy will I please go with the officer."

Ford and Cuttle paid the money to a corporal at a desk in a front office. They waited almost an hour before Colby was led into the same room. He sat down in a chair by the same desk, slouched; three uniformed men also stood near the desk. Colby signed something, got up suddenly and walked out of the room past his friends and on into the hall. Ford and Cuttle quickly followed.

"You gotta know what they know they can and can't do, otherwise they play cat and you're supposed to play mouse. Only I don't like their game. I don't like *them*," was what Colby said to them when Ford and Cuttle caught up to him.

Colby's galoshes flopped as he walked on the hardwood floor in a front hall of the Don Jail building. Ford laughed. Cuttle was sober and stern as they made their ways to the street. She kept glancing back.

"Don't be so paranoid!" Colby yelled at her.

She continued to lag behind. Ford had to trot to keep up with his friend. He watched him tromping ahead along the sidewalk kicking up snow.

"You know it's damn cold in there, damn cold. Never can get completely warm."

Colby wanted to get away from the jail, blocks away, far away, quickly. Ford slowed down for Cuttle. Colby had been subdued but not sheepish when they arrived to get him out. Ford knew that Colby felt slightly in their power: it was their money which freed him. An annoying organic snag: the sustained dependence. It would be some time before he could pay them back.

Cuttle fretted over her one hundred dollar contribution.

"It blows my budget," she told Ford. "Having it tied up like that is stupid. What a waste of money! Christ, I spent more in taxis getting to the bloody bank than I'll get in interest in ten years."

When Colby's call came she had met the expectation, but unwillingly, and wanted to show her dissatisfaction: one thing to chuckle with

your clever capers, she told him; quite another to be responsible for getting you out of the crunches.

Ford had been indifferent, yet interested in the experience: jail, fine, Colby's silly grin -- caught with his pants half down. His contribution was the greater, his anxiety the lesser.

They all took a streetcar most of the way from Yonge to Palmerston. As they got closer to Palmerston Boulevard Ford was alternately giddy and silent. Cuttle and Colby sat together. Ford sat opposite them.

"Did either of you think to pay my rent?" Colby said suddenly.

"How the hell was I supposed to know you hadn't paid your rent?" Cuttle asked angrily. "Am I your keeper for God's sake?"

"What am I supposed to do? Send engraved requests that you help me out once in a while?" Colby blared back at her. "Who's going to do it if you guys don't, eh? B.M.? The asshole's probably hiding under Scagliones' desk at City Hall. Who have I got? Eh?"

"Then why do you deal with him?" Cuttle charged. "He's the one that should have paid your fine. You two buck the cops, the cops'll buck you back."

Colby tapped his fingers on the back of the next seat.

"Don't worry, you'll get your money back," he said to Ford and Cuttle.

"I'm not worried; I wasn't even thinking about the money," Ford said.

"Well *she* sure as fuck is. She begrudges me my freedom."

"I was thinking about how much the words of the law can be like bars around what you do," Ford went on. "Let's face it, we only know

the law by words. The law permeates everything by words."

"I don't feel like being abstract right now," Colby said.

Ford said nothing more but his mind was active with the abstractions and ideas anyway. Cops are the law, he was thinking. Consensus is the law, the law like a big fixer, fixing everything down. To Ford it seemed that only his mobility, walking, riding, driving, prevented the law from settling in on him. Colby was free now of places that would restrict and bore him, cells and rooms in police centres; but he was also free of slow-witted cops ordering his movements for him. Ford surmised, though, that even if Colby had had to serve the six months his brain would have clacked on, forming some elegant revenge against B.M. Ford knew that Colby would have gelled somehow with the physical facts of his circumstance. He knew Colby would have taken each new situation slowly, casually, avoiding getting fixed down.

At the house Ford was laughing to himself as Colby called up the real estate office that collected the rents. Ford had never seen Colby so befuddled.

All three went to *Dingle's*, the tension still strong among them. They played music, drank coffee and ate hot hamburg sandwiches. On Cuttle's suggestion they later went to Fern Rommel's walking more happily through cold March rain. There was music there: a wall-long collection of jazz and pop blues albums. Two large speakers blared and boomed while people drifted in and out. Colby soon loosened up and told and retold his saga. Eventually it became a ballad, a folksy drug culture legend tempered by each retelling. Even Cuttle laughed about having had to 'cough up' to keep poor Colby out of jail.

There were red, blue, black lights and fluorescent posters everywhere; women in tight-fitting clothes lounged and lingered on linoleum floors covered with rug pieces and cushions. Windows were partly open to let in spring air, cool and damp from the earlier rain. Fern Rommel disappeared from time to time reappearing with smiles and vacuous grins.

Ford watched the slow-motion sways of heads and shoulders and listened to the clipped glib lingo, a murmur beneath the music. The pungent odor of incense lurked even a foot above the floor. He hovered in one corner while Cuttle flitted from room to room, appearing locked to one embroidered man, appearing a little later linked to another who wore jeans and sweater. To Ford there seemed a private code of activities going on. Colby danced alone beside the kitchen door starting up his account when he could snag an audience. Ford felt divorced from the activity and saw it all as choppy and cumbersome. Private worlds bumping into one another and spinning off like the electric cars in the carnival ride, a litter of heads and voices, a farrago of movement. Ford experienced a mild panic as he saw himself in the middle of the imbroglio of shuffling people, his mind imbruted by the flux flying around him, by the extensions he was imagining of Colby's adventure, by the involution of sensations lambasting him: voices, laughter, music: guitars, drums, trumpets, cymbals; by localized room noises: a private conversation ravelling motives behind him, a door clsoing, the pop of a wine bottle cork. A pother of people; and he craved peace.

Might Colby have survived alone? he was thinking. Must he have remained in an inviolate city cell if they had not been able to get the fine together? What expectations and dependencies must I have of

my acquaintances? Ford asked himself. What communion? What union? What possibility for a sweet and gentle rolling together? Must any security of emotion be deracinated by expectations and anxiety? He knew Cuttle resented Colby's call for help. He understood the fear of a financial loss but could not accord the seeming solidness of her relationship with Colby to her begrudged help. Must there be a consistency in spontaneity? he asked himself. Can Cuttle want power over some circumstances and none over others? He doubted that there could be any sweet symmetry, any confraternity of kindred people.

His head was a pirouette: thoughts and rhetorical questions.

Fern Rommel appeared with a large bottle. *Liebfraumilch* it looked like from where Ford sat.

I am not myself here, he thought.

Rommel poured the first glass for himself. Others congregated around, quickly emptying it.

Rommel then brought in a bottle of Tequila, lemon quarter and salt. First he squeezed juice onto the top of his closed fist, salted the wet area, then licked it. Then he poured a shot glass of Tequila down his throat. They all wanted to try it.

"Yech!" said a woman who wore large round glasses.

"Is that how they really do it?" wheezed a short man through his twisted mouth.

More wanted to try it. Cuttle grimaced at the sour taste the drink left in her mouth. Colby took three shots without lemon in quick succession. Ford looked on, detached. He did not want to consume the experience, did not want to possess it, however simple and trivial. At

once he saw a splintering of worlds --a world of consciousness, a world of things. The right way to drink Tequila was a world of things, perceived by a world of consciousness, the experience an experience of the intellect. They might remember the taste, Ford thought, the procedure, the number of shots, the bitter, sour Tequila and lemon juice; but what of the experience as integrated and whole?

Rommel brought out his peron and held it high in the air directing a stream of wine down his throat. There were giggles and contests, splutterings and victories.

"I learned it in Spain," Rommel said.

"How long were you in Spain?" they asked him.

"Nine months."

"Did you get to the Balaeric Islands?"

"Yes. But not for long."

"Did you go to Lisbon?"

"Yes; but not for long. Portugal's not very clean."

Ford watched the streams of wine, the hands clasping the peron, the bodies around Fern Rommel, swimming, sticking with soft, slow movements, flabby with noise and throbbing fluorescent lights.

He saw clearly the murderous division: subject and object. He sipped on his own wine and suddenly realized that he was free to get up, to leave, to shout: *hold on! slow down!* He thought of Colby in jail waiting for them to get there with the fine money and he saw Colby now, an expert user of a peron from Spain in Fern Rommel's living room. Which event had happened? At one point Cuttle came and kissed him. At another, a man pranced past in his underwear. The record changed:

*There izz a house in New Orleans
 They call-l-l the ri-z-i-n sun-n-n
 And it's bin the ruin of many a poor boy
 My God I know I'm one-n-n*

He withdrew from the fatness and lubricity of the party, the dividing and indifferent knowledge he had of the events around him estranging him from the mood and purpose of the gathering. He could see himself seeing himself and suddenly Fern Rommel was offering a cold bottle of beer. And gone. Ford held the bottle, some words filtering into his head: hey Ford, how 'bout a pint, whatcha doin' hidin' over here, better keep your eye on Cuttle, I think she's pissed, the voice said at some point close to the sensation of cold and wet from the bottle of beer.

He began to realize how much time was going by: linearly, each album seemed one short song. The music wafted through the rooms in an unending sequence. Someone turned the stack over. Ford vaguely heard deliberations over new selections. Cuttle appeared again and took his empty beer bottle as she sat down beside him with two more. Eventually the music became soothing and moving like a slow sea. Cuttle fell asleep in his lap. No one seemed to be standing up. The first trio of people left; then couples, moving toward the front door. Finally Colby:

"You guys coming?"

They walked slowly through the dark wet streets, no clouds above, stars crisp and clear now, *Ursa Major* and *Auriga* vivid for Colby who pointed them out like a schoolboy. Cuttle hummed songs and leaned against Ford as she walked.

There had been the rapid collocations of events and they whirled

in Ford's head: Colby's incarceration, Colby's call, Colby's stories at the party, Rommel's friends, Rommel's neat knowledge of things clever, Cuttle's disaffection: all quick like sparks.

When he looked down there was black ground between sodden mounds of snow. The mounds were diminishing in size and getting dirtier as they got smaller. At the head of the walk leading up to Cuttle's house Ford leaned over to scoop some up. It was wet and granular. He let the melting mass fall to the sidewalk where it splattered in all directions.

There was a red car parked in front of Colby and Cuttle's place but none of the three had paid attention to it. Its door opened when they started up the walk.

"Ford," a man's voice called.

Ford was rubbing his hands dry against the side of his coat. He turned around without considering who belonged to the anomalous voice.

"Ford," the person said again, getting closer.

Cuttle and Colby turned around before Ford did.

"Ford."

"Sebastian?" Ford answered when he recognized the man's angular face. "What are you doing here?"

The sudden appearance of Sebastian was ambiguous and perplexing. Ford thought of his mother suddenly. He's drunk, was another sudden thrust. Sebastian was remote, obscure, didn't fit: a parallaxic perception of him.

"Your father's been hurt in a car accident."

The words took time, Ford aware in the next moments of what Sebas-

tian was saying; understanding slowly what the man was telling him, the words clogging, though; Ford couldn't get the words stuck to the event, to the shudder distending through him.

"My father?"

"He's in the Colme Hospital."

"What happened?"

"Car-truck collision we heard."

"Where?"

and he asked himself why the details mattered -- to sort out the experience, to perceive it acutely.

"Is he all right?"

Sebastian frowned, his face a question mark.

"Is he dying?"

"They were operating when Dr. Jarry called your mother."

"Is she there now?"

"Robb and Paula took her. Elaine went too."

Ford put his hands in his coat pockets. Cuttle put her hand on his arm.

"Elaine told me you might be here. I came two hours ago. The lady on the first floor there said your friends might not come back at all tonight. I was going to wait until four or five."

Cuttle and Colby listened blankly.

"We should go there Sebastian."

"I should be there for Katherine if he doesn't get through."

"If he dies," Ford said.

They got into the car.

"It's a goddam circus, isn't it?" Ford said through the open window to Cuttle and Colby. They looked on helplessly as the red car drove off along the wet, black street.

28

He sat down on the shoulder of the road and stuck out his thumb at every passing car or truck going north. His legs were immensely weary and again a thirst jabbed at his throat. For a time sitting there he fretted over losing his book to the bulldozer driver, but soon the annoyance passed. He leaned back on his elbows and gravel dug into his skin. The oat field across the road tempted him. He wanted to stretch out and sleep in it, stare into the sky, postpone everything.

A transport truck thundered past, dust and stones and gushes of air ramming him. He wondered if there were any ancient graves under the roadbed.

Finally he got up and headed across the road to the field, catching the crotch of his pants on a barb as he climbed over the fence. Walking northwest through the oats, down off the road and moving.

There was a diaphanous glass panel in the door of the hospital waiting room. When people moved past outside, their images came to Katherine as sudden diffuse motions across the glass. She sat in a black leatherette chair picking and pulling at the beads on the strap of her purse, a darkness over her mind fogging out any relief from the tension of waiting and not knowing. She pulled at the strap as if at a long, taut string which reached back to some unconscious secret, the string beginning and ending in mute knots, dark and tangled. But the cold hell of a reckless insouciance washed over her continuously.

They had arrived in a whirlwind, the nurse at the small front desk speaking from her nimbus of white sanctity, Katherine resenting her. The fragments of information chafed Katherine until there was a rising and falling concern in her mind, in her mood. What bloody miscalculation is bringing us all here? she had thought as Robb's car got closer and closer to Colme, so unexpectedly, so unhappily.

Elaine slouched against the arm of the couch with her coat pulled up around her shoulders. Paula dozed in another chair, her purse precariously on her lap, a closed magazine underneath it. Robb sat beside her on a wood chair.

Katherine had been a cork riding the sea, one minute feeling herself in a position to speculate: "What has that fool done now?" --and a few moments later the illusion that all really was 'normal' sweeping over her, displacing the crushing fear. Then she would feel a pang, to turn back to Toronto, back to the tenuous and unthreatening routine of her work, her home, her Sebastian. Outside Listowell she had started to

cry, unable to contain the swell, unable to keep the secret suppressed and the miles piled up behind her like a countdown.

When Clyde Jarry's call came through she had listened in silence, mumbling one word before hanging up the phone: "yes". Elaine was in the room.

"It's your father," Katherine said, white with perturbation.

"That was dad on the phone?"

"No; Dr. Jarry. Your father might die."

"Die?"

"That's why they want me there. He's had an accident in Colme."

Katherine sat silent for several minutes, unable to grip the situation, ignoring Elaine's further questions.

Elaine's temerity -- calls to her uncle and aunt, tears, confusion, packing night bags while her mother sat alone in the living room. Paula and Robb came immediately and their questions ran Katherine into spiraling indecision.

"But how badly?"

"Where is he?"

"Did they say if he's in a coma or not?"

"Can we see him?"

"Where would we stay if we went? We can't stay at the house. Oh, Robb, can you get the time off work? Should we call the doctor back and find out if he's all right?" Paula's questions rattled at her.

Katherine agreed to go to Colme with them even though she knew they could never know how much she was ravaged, how impure she felt because of her need to rush to Ernie, flung there in spite of herself.

When the question of Sebastian's coming arose her first reaction was an alarmed, "No." She feared the clash, the merging worlds of her life in Colme and her life in Toronto and she feared Ernie's eyes, his victorious grin. They tried to find Ford.

"It's so clear, so clear to me how divided we are," Katherine said when their calls failed to turn him up.

Elaine brought a temporary peace to the mounting tension by suggesting that Sebastian be asked to find and inform Ford. They decided they must leave without him.

"Can't we phone and get everything clear about what's going on there before we go?" Robb asked before they left.

"Dr. Jarry said to come," Katherine said simply.

In the car after a long silence, the car whizzing along the Gardiner Expressway West, she said suddenly:

"Ford will want to come to his father."

In Colme she hesitated on the hospital steps, an unconscious knowledge and intuition of the irreversibility of the events transpiring inside, churning in her.

"When things go wrong once, you can never right them again," Ernie had said often to her about his business.

She wanted to banish the possibility of his death from her mind. It was too soon, too arbitrary, too final. As she walked through the hospital hall she was thinking: most dying is done in hospitals. A burst of motion subsequently took them from the information desk to the waiting room. It was disappointing to get there, to have only to sit down, to wait, while a minute away Ernie lay unconscious, dying. In the

waiting room they deluged each other with speculation and cautious euphemisms until they were all silent. Katherine, stiff and pensive on her chair, aware of the wild fluctuations going on inside her: tepid, hot, cool, cold; *most dying is done in hospitals*, she was thinking.

"He might die, Elaine . . ." she had said, experiencing deeply and terribly the radical insecurity and contingency of physical death. What seemed inexhaustable life, in which conflict and hate could prosper and endure, now spent for her husband and her, the end in sight if not already here. What then for him? she thought; a sleep and a forgetting? Will he forget all of what was around us, what we were? will he forget it all now? she asked herself. He *should* die, he *should* die; to balance everything that's happened, to make it real, and to put us all at rest.

The clock continued its slow succession of minutes. Robb went out and brought back coffee. Katherine put hers on the floor beside the chair and left it.

"It's stupid they make us wait so long without telling us anything," Paula said to her husband.

Robb inquired at the desk again and returned with the same blank and hopeless grimace. A little later he went to find rooms at the motel just south of town. While he was arranging that, it had occurred to him to gamble a quick trip to the *Ontario Provincial Police* office where there might be more details about the accident. The nurse at the information desk had said that she knew nothing:

"Are there charges against him?" Katherine asked when they came in.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Giffen, but I don't know; if you'd like to wait in the . . ."

After Robb went they all sat inside their thoughts, no one able to muster words to fill the silences, but all their hands, eyes, shuffles, were verbs and adjectives, all a fretful whimpering describing itself unconsciously.

Katherine felt neutral, a sluggish unconcern with where she was, with what she must be doing and feeling. It just is; it bores me here, she murmured inaudibly; it bores me here. There was the corpulent, flabby silence, everyone tangled and excessive in the room; no answers, each expectation an ordeal of despair, and always the recurring indifference at the root of her feeling, an indifference which she alternately welcomed and deplored, all floundering around her like a jelly.

"It's midnight," Elaine said suddenly, her words punctuating the stillness and Katherine, thinking all over again, and all over again as for the first time: *He is very fast for you Kathy*. Her life seemed riddled with an unanswerable and staggering injustice.

Suddenly a middle-aged man and a young woman, his daughter apparently, appeared at the half-open door. There was a frightened and exhausted frown on the man's face when he looked in, his daughter hidden behind. They turned away quickly, disappearing down the hall, reappearing a moment later at the door.

A short time passed; a nurse came and spoke to them in the hall and they followed her somewhere. Instantly the room tingled with the event impending, the fact imminent, Katherine's mind racing through the possibilities, the calamity, the horror of facing it the next instant, a darkness in the bright room that murmured and was palpable: these people mean death, she thought, death in the crisp wet spring night, Ernie's

death in Colme, and she had not seen him alive for so many months, years which all seemed plentiful lost time, the thousands of hours, the millions of seconds ticking . . . and gone. So it was possible to be gone.

The door with the glass panel was now fully open, an upturned proscenium arch for the drama unfolding in the hall. The man and woman returned, led by the nurse. They met a doctor near the door, and as if signalled, the young woman threw herself against her father, plunging her face into his coat and chest, holding her cheeks, Katherine connecting the event to the event, watching the girl's hair flying, her head swinging from side to side, Katherine knowing how vague and unsure her knowledge was, knowing it to be true without the words stuck to it, remembering, remembering her own hair,

*I'm the first that ever burst
Take a man, you're always cursed*

her head rolling from side to side

no, no, Ernie, no

while a few streets away Robb was at the police station talking to a young man in green clothes with a bandage on his forehead, or so Katherine pictured him later as they drove to the motel, Paula meticulously prying details from Robb about what the young farmer had said and Robb recalling:

"He kept saying, 'What can I say?' "

and knowing also what Katherine learned watching the mourning daughter,

"What can I say, I saw him pulling out of the sideroad, I saw him, but he came over so far, into my lane, I couldn't stop -- I pulled them out; she was all apart, her arm, I must have pulled it off, it came off,

my God, it came off, the car was burning; I had to pull them out of there . . ."

Katherine had wanted to console the young woman, to hold the daughter, the daughter to her, the girl tossing her head from side to side, moaning, weeping, until Dr. Clyde Jarry walked into the room and her mind jumped away from the hall:

*. . . why there, it's coming . . . Katherine,
he's here, you have a son . . .*

and coming to the same waiting room with news

. . . your father's in recovery now

and Ford's broken arm flashing at her, the doctor's amused grin:

he sure did that one up good, didn't he?

while the little boy howled at the sight and pain of the triple fracture, sitting so small and trembling on the table holding up his arm curved like a semi-circle, the starched white cloth . . .

"Katherine, the woman who was in Ernie's car died . . ." Dr.

Jarry began;

and she was filling to bursting but knew it was futile

it is, is, just is a woman dead, an unknown woman, dead

"but your husband has come through it. There's localized cerebral catastrophe. We got the pieces out, of bone . . . "

All at once? all at once? Katherine was shouting in her head.

*Doctor, doctor, will I die?
Yes, my child, and so will I.*

"fragmentary bone lodged in the vestibular membrane and optic cavity; and the wound in his abdomen . . ."

It's because he's dying I came, she thought, and suddenly it was

quieter in the room, more space now, a permeating stillness while she stared up at the doctor.

"Katherine, it's better if you go and rest. The nurse will give you a sedative; we don't have to do anything more tonight."

*I'm the first that ever burst
Take a man you're always cursed*

"Katherine," Paula said soothingly, "Robb's out in the hall; we can go now. He's got us all a room at the motel. Don't you think we should go now and you can rest?"

no, no, Ernie, no

the mortgage, the girl, the baby, the money, her hair, in her hands and Ernie arcing hot and sweating over her, straining under him, straining to get him all, she not twenty

"Katherine, come now and rest . . . "

*at my house? and rest? . . . Katherine I must
really I must tell you as a friend of you and
of your father and mother tell you as a friend
no, no
and do you know he's mortgaged . . .
and you let him? your father's house?
he's mortgaged the house . . .
why did you let him?
. . . the house, MY HOUSE?*

the girl's head rolling from side to side, buried in her father's arms, Katherine's head rolling from side to side, he's so fast, Kathy, so fast

*I needed the money for
a car! say car!
. . . for a business investment . . . I needed
the money, and all I had was the house . . .
My father's house! There used to be fields, sweet
green fields when his father, when I was a girl*

her arms to her head, denying, denying
her arms to his face, denying, denying

Katherine I must tell you as a friend,
you know me, to be a friend, since you
 were just a little girl
Mrs. Kincaid, always your friend

. . . as a friend?

Ernie Giffen done 'er wrong
Fuck'd 'er with his six foot dong

They're laughing at us Ernie!

As a friend Katherine . . . I tell you it's
for another purpose he got the second mortgage
BUT I DON'T BELIEVE YOU . . . I can't believe

Ernie Giffen got 'er wheee!
Now she needs a D'n C

They're laughing, Ernie, Ernie, they're stoning us
Ernie

. . . as a friend I can tell you that Daphne Anderson
 nineteen
is at the Wellesley in Toronto I have the facts
Katherine

A second mortgage for an abortion, Ernie? But who
 who could loan for on our home
what INTEREST, Ernie; what INTEREST?

severe internal hemmorrhage, Katherine, the facts

I'll pay it back for Chrissake: it's only a lousy
fifteen hundred

You're a whoremaster

You're not the first who ever burst Kathy
You're not the first who ever burst
You're not the first . . . Kathy

my father's house!
Your father's dead . . . it's my house
they're laughing at us Ernie an everlasting
lasting laugh at us Ernie and now, nothing, I have
 nothing
that's right! you and your goddam house it's nothing
but an old brick shed and I was goddam lucky to get

fifteen hundred on it

They're laughing Ernie . . .

ring around the rapist

ring around the rapist

and they all fall

there are no virgins

left

". . . the damage to the left ear and eye apparatus; there may be partial paralysis, Katherine, and we found traces, only traces, and the traces aren't necessarily malignant, the patella of the right leg, it may stiffen . . ."

All at once? all at once? Katherine was thinking, letting the doctor's words settle into her mind, hurling her into an anguish of dissolution, forcing her to feel the barrenness of her routine, to feel how unreplenished she was in her life. She imagined Ernie, alive, only feet from her, his body crumbled and twisted, yet alive, so that the hate and strain could live on and ooze over their mortal tedium.

"He's going to be all right," Paula said. "Come with Robb and me now, Kathy . . . we'll take you to the motel to rest."

"Mother," Elaine was saying, a look of tenderness in her face, "we can come back in the morning; we should rest now."

--while the squalls and eddies of explanation, ha, would any explanation be likely? expected? necessary? Shall I confront him? she was thinking. Busted whoremaster sprawled on a deathbed who got what was coming to him and the poor fool who crashed into him a man-slaughterer, a killer, the woman, the seeds still swimming in her pulp--

"I'm all right . . ."

"Mother, father's going to be all right . . ."

father? our father who art in bed

"I'm all right, I am, the girl, it's the girl, her mother?"

"Please now, Kathy," Robb speaking, "we'll forget about it for now and go; please, Kathy."

"Please, mother," Elaine repeated.

"I'm okay; the girl, she was so beautiful; where did they go?"

"They're upstairs, Katherine," Dr. Jarry speaking.

"I'll be all right; but Clyde, I can see him, will he . . ."

"In the morning," the doctor's voice came back. "It's likely we'll have to send him to Toronto. Will you ride in the ambulance?"

"It would be better if you did, Katherine," Paula said reassuringly.

"He would want that."

She got up and walked along the corridor with them, aware of their voices at a distance, aware of their attentiveness to her, resenting it because they could not feel the turbulence in her breast. For an instant in the dim light of the hall she felt quite relieved, living with the illusion so easily when moving, acting out definite directions, concentrating on going to the motel. But she watched the lingering way Elaine moved her feet, step by step, and knew that her daughter did not really want to leave. How firm a grip her husband had on their children over the years, over the storms and gusts of their lives, she thought. Her anger mounted, chasing away the relief until they stepped outside and cold drizzle hit her face. Robb ran ahead to open the car. She wished they were going to the house on the River Road instead of to a motel.

The windshield wipers slapped monotonously through abandoned streets.

"We'll stay until we know what they're going to do, take him to Toronto or whatever," Paula said.

There was a silence and everyone but Katherine became alert to the car sliding through the dark. Katherine glanced at the motel's sign: *Colme Motor Inn* and at the 'no vacancy' banner in red neon swirls just below. The car stopped in front of their unit. "Let's all get some sleep," Robb said.

She felt disembodied, her mind fixing on new determinations. They became clear to her and she sensed a strange fatality in them, her impulse to go the whole way, to cast off the impurity she felt for having returned. She wanted to go to their house, to find it not violated by any life which had not acknowledged her. She fought the pull on into the morning hours until dawn etched vague patterns on the walls of the room. She wanted to go to their house, to bring full circle her life. She looked down at Elaine sleeping beside her, curled into the blankets and then quite suddenly a strange black passion surged up in her, alone in the bed, so many dark nights alone, all mad -- Ernie so close, broken, their house so close, empty in the night.

She looked across the room at Robb and Paula who slept apart, Robb's arms sprawled across his pillow like a cross; Paula secure and immobile in one corner. Their sleep beside each other seemed unrenewing somehow, monotonous in its fixity, a flick in an infinite number of unfinished nights, their permanence and quiescence not a trust in rest but a resignation, some horrible and recurrent outrage, the flash and trivial panic of their individual resolved lives, their perpetuation seeming incestuous and desperate to her. But she also saw her loneliness there. She looked down beside herself again and saw Elaine hugging the blankets to her bosom, her buttocks and thighs under the covers curved like a sensual stat-

ue in the grey of the room.

In the silence Katherine's mind fumbled to reconcile the tugging, the coaxing; all outside the first light of a new day drawing her away, and behind and beneath everything she fixed her eyes on, the lucid flashes from the house, consuming her: Ernie at Easter grumbling about having to take her and the children to mass; the two church-dressed children scrambling around the living room in war over chocolate eggs; while the nights, an unrelenting rush of them, Katherine alone with the same strange black passion surging up in her, while he carried on the affairs of sales and profits, the dreary excluders, the nullifiers which made her wish days away by the month lot, every unspecial communion a cloud-ed drudgery; and thundering in those nights the faces of the infidels, laughing harlots hugging their Purina Man in motel beds, the stream of them she denied, denied, until the young and final one, the severer, as slowly by day by night by grim day she let the brutal elation of her hope in their marriage dissipate and disappear in undetected wisps shading during unplanned insomnias into some suicidal unconcern and disbelief, letting imaginary anchors disappear in despair, her tensile bosom waiting anyway for the event so inevitable and undeniable that she might want to lay herself down dead with a will. She sat up to banish the malaise: no support from within, no support from without; just grey near-dawn around her and, she imagined, especially outside near the river, cold-grey perspectives where the house was, where she would go alone, necessarily.

She dressed quietly. Paula stirred for a few seconds but Katherine decided not to stop, not to lie down again, not to *imagine* the house any

longer, not to see its rooms and furniture in her mind.

The day was not yet born full, no spring-warm sun anywhere; cold wet chilling her chest and legs as she closed the door and walked out into the parking lot. She moved quickly along the highway the quarter-mile into town, no mists close enough to hold the droplets to her face. But just above the fields the milkiness like a threatening haze over any reality, nubilous time making her airy and carefree, until the buildings of the town preoccupied her: Ackert at his store like a king, talking on the sidewalk with hoary-headed acquaintances while his livelihood proceeded inside in her hands; the pills and jars of salve tumbling across the counter in clattering buckets in *Lynch's*, rapid collocations of her time there; and near the old Post Office, abandoned by the government now for a new one-storey place, people living in the apartments upstairs in the old one. Across the street the Town Hall: by the front door the sign -- LAD ES WASH OM. They used to laugh, and try not to touch the toilet seat with their buttocks. The phone booth just at the left of the door, a gathering place for hoydenish high school girls she had never been invited to chum with. Farther on, Best West Hotel, Welsh's Men's Wear, *Colme Advance Times*, and Trasks's shop with two chairs; Molloy's Five and Dime, Hing's Restaurant: they were all there, permanent in Colme in the empty streets, in the hulking facades of the stores as she walked toward their house, toward the spring river, north and east, the peculiar calm of dawn everywhere, the solitary sounds of her shoes on the pavement.

Up Shuter Street, wet, black boughs of leafless maples and oaks thick over front lawns, stretching skeleton fingers at uninhabited verandahs, no promise of green lush spring in their black friezes. With

house after house came memories of the streets when as a girl she defied stern rules and buried herself in leaves, red, yellow, gold, imaginary walls for houses, fortresses along lawn-front territories: and the sweet smell of them burning in piles on the curb. But now as she walked, small mounds of snow between dark earth and brown-green suggestions of grass; and no late March promise of blossoms or the first gold-green. Rather, the cold slicing through her, the movement of her body feeding the will to enter their house, to see it again clearly, to requite the pull and the push. Already the town was thinning out into open fields.

Beyond where Shuter Street met Gorrie Lane, stretched a wide field of grass, a quarter mile of neglected turf to the edge of the Maitland River, in front of which the River Road with its potted pavement ran parallel and a small congeries of two storey houses surrounded by tall maples and elms stood. She intended to cross the field rather than to follow Gorrie Lane west to the highway and north again to where it met the River Road. She headed across the snow-splotched field toward the four houses. The grass was wet and patches of mud every few feet sucked at her shoes until her feet were numb with cold. She looked up to the sky wanting the sun to be burning holes through the thick grey-black overcast but from the east came only splinters of dull white light along the horizon, the glow diffusing into the rest of the sky getting weaker as it climbed westward.

Their house came into sharper focus, the labyrinth of branches of a coppice in front of the verandah, the pillars supporting the verandah roof as yet silhouettes from where she looked on as she walked; the red

brick and the green shingled roof, just as she had left them, just as they had always been and must always be. For a moment she imagined everything as it was any late March on the River Road: she remembered her first halting self-conscious passion with Ernie in the front yard of Surlin Kincaid's abandoned farmhouse a few miles to the east.

Behind the houses, behind their house, always the hint of river, glimpses through the bushes and trees, but as she got closer to the house the river disappeared. She knew it was there, fast, deep, cold, below the promontory. She saw clearly now the dark tangle of lilac bushes along the verandah and as she stepped onto the pavement of the River Road, two cars gripped her eyes, *one of them Sebastian's*, parked at the far end of the drive which ran along the east side of the house. The sight of them shocked her into immobility, ramming into her brain like an incongruous image, making her life in Toronto and her life in Colme come together into a perverse unity. She wanted some captious demon to spring up in front of her and argue the cars as an illusion. But in the dawn light she knew it was Sebastian's car, and another car parked ahead of his. She wanted leafy shadows to cover them, removing them from the dull prospect of driveway. There were no shadows, no leaves, no obscuring or distracting apparitions. There were the red bricks of the house arm's length away, the damp cold all around, light through the living room window. She looked through the window, saw the four-bulb chandelier hanging from the old-fashioned high ceiling. She walked to the front of the house and moved across the verandah to the picture window. The drapes were drawn almost together but she looked through the narrow opening, on through the French doors of the parlour,

and saw Sebastian sitting cross-legged on the couch, his lips moving, hands gesturing, his face fixed on some listener. She tried to get the right angle of vision and finally saw a woman in the sofa chair by the fireplace. No sounds coming from their voices, her urge to storm into the room, to beat away the intruders, Sebastian inside the Colme house rupturing the fine barrier she had allowed to form between her two worlds; his presence forcing her to face her sense of sin and utter worthlessness, forcing her into the spaces between the two worlds, the spaces between the parts of her own life, spaces that threatened to trap her if she admitted them, if she peered into them too deeply, too long, allowing them to bump her backwards in darkness towards darkness, nudging mawkish lifebuoys into her consciousness only to pull them back at the critical moment --

it's Sebastian, in there, in the house

both worlds undeniably one. She could find no support inside, outside. There was the glass of the window, cold against her fingertips, and inside the house all the miserable actions and impotent deceits of her and Ernie's life there, dramatic dancers in slow motion: she imagined Ernie pushing down on Elizabeth's spread legs, his hands curled back under her buttocks cradling her middle to him, middle to middle, her arms and legs wrapped around, holding him down to her. The images pounded at her; she didn't want them to fill her brain, until she realized that the pane of glass under her hands would shatter if she pressed it any harder. While inside they did not notice her, their mouths and hands communicating, warm and cut off in the room. She wanted to shout out to them. She stood straight up, desperately undecided, walked slowly to the door, wan-

ting to go in but with no clear reason, no clear purpose to cement the two worlds finally, no energy to walk back into their rooms, into the dead rooms, into the spate of images thriving there. She felt the empty engulfing worthlessness more intensely when her hand surrounded the door knob, skin on cold metal, touching its hard surfaces, the immanence and impotence of each sensory detail descending on her, crushing her into immobility.

She let her hand fall, wanting to escape, wanting to go back to what had been so long composed, her imperfect two part dance, one part so cluttered and potential inside her, the other flawed and monotonous outside her. But Sebastian! Sebastian! a flicker of hope, a possibility fumbling in her mind for some meaning, and none forthcoming, none. Only an emptiness there.

And as she had done once before, Katherine turned compulsively away from her house and fled, never intending a permanent retreat, never seeing any finality in her choice. She did not want to face what she could not control. In the house her responses must be spontaneous and passionate, Sebastian there, Elizabeth there, poles pulling her apart, making her tremble to step into their power. She ran toward the road. Sebastian must be looking for me, she was thinking as she ran. Where else could he come but to the hospital or the house? But the woman, Elizabeth, in their house! Sebastian as a strength, as a touchstone for her feelings, fading, insubstantial and illusory, and she felt again the denser motionless hurts that had stayed behind after every ecstasy, after every sweep of hope. She stopped on the pavement, a mild panic of direction in her body, unable to return toward town, unwilling

to face Paula, Robb, Elaine, the hospital, Ernie alive everywhere near her.

Impulsively she turned around to face the faint but increasing luminosity in the eastern sky; back along the front of the house daring to look in through the small opening again; Sebastian talking there. She moved past, along the drive, the red car's hood warm as her hands groped along it. She stumbled into the back yard along Elizabeth's car, toward the three old lawn chairs at the end of the yard, toward the old maple leaning so pathetically now over the river, toward the river spring full, rushing cold and grey in the early morning, visible solely as a broad dark motion, swift and dangerous, occasional shimmers strutting from bank to bank, the sound of its flow a muted churning.

The poplars and lilac bushes at the back of the yard were a skeletal bulwark against its slicing drive to the lake. She walked and stumbled, wanting to fall into one of the chairs or to collapse into the river to find a centre, to find a moment, a space of calm in its centre. A stale smell seemed to sink down from the spongy sky as she moved. Then she saw a man's form by the bank and in the same instant as she discerned the broad, brown-grey surface of water, impetuous and vehement, she knew it was Ford.

He was facing the river, one arm against the leaning maple, the other loose at his side. He was looking out across the water unaware of her.

both worlds join here

She stood motionless a few yards behind him, his presence a greater catalyst than Sebastian's, a greater jarring, wrenching presence. A

thin protest rose from her soundlessly like the silent grey mist over the water. It was a meticulous lie to her, the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of her one possible whole world: it was all a false reality, a plunging blade, an infinity of unfinished moments and now one dark night of nothingness. How wretched, how railing, she felt; the span of her life dissipated into dichotomies and terrors, the spaces of her life threatening to imprison her, the recurrent swell of utter worthlessness rolling over her.

Ford turned around and saw her there.

"You're here!" he cried, taking his hand away from the tree.

She said nothing. Her eyes looked out at him, wide and wondering, almost a child's, seeing the fatigue in his face.

"Did you see Sebastian?" he asked quietly.

Still she said nothing. She walked slowly toward him, watching him as if he were not really there.

"We got to the hospital about four-thirty but the night nurse said you'd all left around one. Where were you? Only one here is Elizabeth. She didn't know where you were."

"It is Elizabeth in there?"

"Haven't you been in?"

Ford noticed her shoes: black mud, spatters on her shins and skirt.

"Where did you come from just now? Mrs. Kincaid's?"

"Elizabeth . . ." Katherine said softly.

"Haven't you been in to see Sebastian?" Ford repeated.

"I can't go in," she answered, looking away from Ford, toward the river.

"Elizabeth came here last night. She was afraid to go in to the hospital. She thought you'd be there."

"Why did she come here?"

"Where else could she go? The hospital didn't call her; she found out from the O.P.P. She parked by the hospital after the police called her; but she was afraid to go in. Were you at Kincaid's? We didn't think to go there. We thought you might be at the motel but we figured it best to let you all sleep until morning."

"No," Katherine said, and added angrily, "Why to . . . the house?"

"Where else could she go? For Christ sake she cares about him too you know."

Katherine turned toward Ford and lifted her eyes to his face, a darkness covering them.

"Doesn't it hurt you that she violates our home . . . especially now?" she pleaded.

"Violates? What do you mean *violates*? She's been here every time I've been back. She might as well not own her own house; it's way the hell and gone out on Number 86. When are you going to realize that your vigil is in vain? It's trivial and joyless. He's not waiting for you. He never was. The nurse says he's going to pull through."

"There was another woman in his car!" Katherine cried.

"I know."

"He killed her."

"He killed her? What kind of crap is that? The goddam truck killed her."

"He killed her! He kills every woman he touches! What about her

in there? Does she know what he was doing? Does she? Are you going to defend him to her too? Or did you already? Why do you take his part? Why do you hate me?"

"What the hell are you screaming for? Look, your expectations sure as fuck aren't mine. I don't care how he treats his women. They make choices too, just like you did. Am I to despise you because you're one of his cast-offs too?"

"Cast-offs?"

"Cast-off! What the hell do you think he's done to you? Instead of fighting him to the wall, you ran. Why'd you let him sit on this house for so long?"

"He violated that too! He's spoiled everything, everything!"

"I don't understand you; you make the past into now. There's *nothing* permanent, mother. There's only death and change. That's all. He forgot about you long ago."

Katherine moved very close to Ford. He was frightened suddenly and shied from her closeness.

"And you defend him, you always did. You betray me, forsake me! You're a regenerate bastard like him. Why? Why do you defend him!?"

Ford stepped back slightly, an overwhelming disgust and weariness swamping him. He made a sweeping gesture with his hands and turned away.

"Oh fuck off," he whined, his voice trailing off.

And Katherine's face twisted in rage, her body lunging forward at her son like a beast, striking him with her fists:

"Bastard! bastard! bastard!" she screamed, bringing her fists down on his face and shoulders, beating at the word, the terse, foul word,

beating at the traitor, beating at her emptiness, beating at impotence, despair, darkness.

Ford's feet slid on the promontory. He stumbled back toward the bank behind him, reaching automatically out to her, missing her, and grabbing at the tree. Still she beat down at him: *fuck! fuck!* she screamed as he fell back toward the river below. She froze, suddenly aware of his falling, terror and anger in her face. He saw her stretching toward him, the tree and sky spinning around him, cold water closing over his face.

The current took him immediately. He swirled with the ice and debris in the swollen water, pushing his head to the surface, seeing his mother crashing into the frigid grey, a flopping mess of arms and legs, but no cry from her, no sound except the thumping and splashing of her body hitting. He struggled to get to her but the currents fought him and carried him away. He kicked and reached toward the shore, the searing, ripping cold digging into his back and legs, sucking the warmth away. He saw her for an instant as she floundered a few yards from him, her eyes closed, her mouth wide like a prayer.

In the next instant he was raving and raging to get to her, shrieking for help, gulping in water until the pain exploded in his chest, sinking into the deathly greyness. But a single terrifying need rose in him as he went down; his mind storming with one pure will, to get to her, to pull her from their hell, amuck with cold pain, maddening disorientation, revolving grey, possessed with one objective, one act, until he finally pushed himself to the air, grasping at it. He felt himself go, exhausted, relaxing involuntarily into the current, feeling it

carry him away from her, on smooth rolls of cold. But the sole thrust, the one death wish coaxed him from the resigning grey: he twisted against the flow, pushing, tearing at the water, pulling himself down, down against the headlong resistance, into a cold and terrifying darkness, searching for her, his body one last wheeling and screaming eddy of arms and legs letting go its last strength, and finally obeying no longer, stiffening in the grey.

Soon he felt the air on his face, cold, shocking, and a piercing blast in his lungs, stretching his body out, out to the sky. He wanted to yield again to the coming dark and silence, but the river bucked and tossed him. He opened his eyes and saw the bank, a dense brown, solid, and he reached for it, an anxiousness coming over him that he might not get there, a fantastic passion for life reasserting itself among his terror, cold, confusion. He reached and pushed until the mud and gravel bit into his hands, pulling away his fingernails, gouging out the skin of his palms, holding him, his legs swinging away with the current, yanking him from the shore. He pushed, slowly nudging up into the brown, water slapping at his sides, stinging pain in his palms making him claw more at the solid bank until he rested against it and as if the river yielded suddenly, rolling him slowly, collapsing him against the cold mud and rock. He was coughing, letting go, trusting the earth to hold him from the intimate grey death behind, beside, beneath, and he would struggle no more, no more.

He lay there with no strength, only short minutes, he thought; then stiffening with alarm, all at once desperately cold and slipping, as if teetering on the edge of a couch, cold travelling up his legs

like a million ants nibbling simultaneously. He felt hard gravel and oozing mud between his fingers: pushed himself upwards, his hands sliding painfully against the conglomerate. Finally his legs came out of the water and he felt secure on the bank. In the next minutes he crawled up and over the edge, and sank slowly into the cold stubble of grass and bushes; but a spiralling horror streaked through him, louder and louder

my God

jerking himself around toward the river which swept past below, one wide murderous flow toward Lake Huron.

She's down there

his body struggling and mindless, the realization that she was gone, gone under, brutal in its irreversible finality, a current cold as hell nudging her somewhere along the bottom, coaxing her, far below in the grey-black, gone.

He got up on his knees and stared into the expanse of water, bent over the edge straining to see. Some moments passed before he grasped the meaning of his helplessness. His legs were weak unsure carriers but he ran for the house, running blindly, not even sure where it was, shrieking again for help, for help.

The river had carried him downstream past the fence that ran along the property line, easily a hundred yards. He felt the air bitterly cold on the clinging, soaked clothes. He couldn't run fast enough, stumbling over small bushes, rebounding off trees, crashing into the back kitchen his bloody hands raised in front of him screaming for Sebastian who met him at the door to the living room and caught him in his arms as

he fell headlong toward the floor.

Distant and frantic outsiders clogged the next hours. He and Sebastian finally stood on the bank watching the O.P.P. boat dragging the river. They watched and waited in silence. The three men in the boat searched the water and their drag lines cut into the current like knives. When the boat floated back downstream for another return the motor snorted in neutral, a whacking sound in the morning cold. The boat pushed against the current coming back upstream tracing an efficient grid into the river moment after long moment.

At the hospital as the nurses bandaged his hands Ford spoke haltingly, sobbingly, to two policemen. They assumed Katherine had been a suicide and that Ford had tried to stop her. He said nothing to change their theory.

Sebastian stood on the bank as immobile and leaning as the maple. Nearby, quite alone, the wind lapping her dress around her knees, Elizabeth stood watching, crying. She seemed pathetic to Ford, pathetic in the way she could declare no right to the grief she felt, pathetic in the way everyone ignored her, her grief cementing the two worlds Katherine had wanted to keep separate.

"I can't get it into me that she's dead down there," Sebastian said looking out at the river. "If I'd known she was here, right here . . ."

"She'll be more real in death," Ford said calmly.

"Don't you feel any pain?" Sebastian cried, turning to face him.

"I have pain."

"Where?" Sebastian cried.

"I hated her weaknesses," Ford answered immediately. "I hated how I could see her thoughts, the way I knew her thoughts so well. She had no mystery for me, Sebastian. I was impatient with her; now I can't be impatient. She would never kill herself."

But even Sebastian had listened to and accepted the police interpretation.

Paula, Robb, and Elaine came. There were questions, cries of disbelief, and tragedy after tragedy, dissolution slamming through their lives.

By mid-morning the police found her. Ford watched from the house as they put the covered body into an ambulance and took it away. Colme people crowded in and out. The stained and blistered paint in the kitchen made patterns that Ford traced mentally while he watched their processions. Arrangements got made, the great dark ignominy of death thundering from every word, every frown. Elaine came to cry in his arms. From time to time Paula came out to see. She was constantly in tears and each time she came near Ford in the kitchen she clasped him to her bosom and shook her head fretfully. Robb occupied himself with phone calls, with drying Ford's clothes in the electric dryer in the back kitchen; and when Elaine came to Ford again she expected him to say something, to embrace her, to comfort her. But Ford had nothing to say. At one o'clock he and Sebastian left for Toronto.

"So it all stops," Sebastian said.

"Where's the rage? I don't feel anything anymore!" Ford said.

They cried quietly, self-consciously, and the car moved through white and black countryside.

"Something dies on this life-infested rock of a planet and we're supposed to rage against the injustice right away. She doesn't make me want to rage. It's as if she wanted everything redeemed. It was killing her, some unconscious will in her killing her. It's probably the most intimate thing she's ever done," Ford said.

Sebastian looked across at him.

"But I know, Sebastian, at the moment it happened she could not will her own death."

They had left without seeing Ernie, so many open ends nagging them until the miles made the closing impossible. Eventually they drove in silence, their slowly growing grief and shock more and more private, more and more hidden.

In Toronto Sebastian left Ford at his mother's house. They had arrived in their moving dream, an immense weariness stealing over them both once the car stopped moving. They were happily away from the oppressive formality in Colme but afraid for the hours ahead they must spend alone before the funeral, each unable in his way to ease that time with the gush of crucifers, acolytes, thurifers, wake time, requiem. The barrage of events were strangling and nullifying them, some diabolical coldness clammy and monstrous around their throats. They were afraid it would all catch up to them, the shocks and upheavals of one single day, all to trap and paralyze them, the sordid accomplished fact of her death spreading over their lives like a prison, Ernie's accident a dim, unimportant shadow.

"I want to let it end," Ford said, getting out of the car. "To get away from them all."

Sebastian didn't answer. He pulled the gear shift down to 'drive'. The engine suddenly chugged, anxious to go.

"Shall I get you for the funeral?" he asked.

"No," Ford said simply. "I'll not be going back there," and he shut the car door.

Sebastian drove off without saying more. Ford went into the house. When he got to the living room he sprawled on the couch but his mind pounded with the images of his mother suspended in the water with her arms stretched out like Christ at the Ascension. He called Cuttle several times but got no answer, each time letting the phone ring longer and longer. After dusk he walked the entire distance to Palmerston Boulevard but the blocks weren't long enough, the distances too small, the time a pulsing, a tormenting pulsing. Cuttle was not there. He hammered on Colby's door, almost prostrate with relief when it opened.

"Clare. . . let me stay tonight, I can't stay at home. Cuttle's not here. I don't know where else to go."

Penumbral Zone residua of Ford Percy Giffen, B.A., S.I.N. 420240830, b. 291247, Ont. d.l. S1418-15654-71227, urban Canadian male, August 23/71 Anno Domini, agnostic, 6:28 p.m. E.D.S.T., Highway 4 North, mile 1.3 of 12 from Blyth pop. 200 to Colme pop. 3000; and those lucid bits of the mosaic of his consciousness-continuum, from dusk, and on:

. . . why north do i know why i'm going north my relative direction over the fence across the field where a gentleman farmer of field produce and live stock as well a teacher at the local high school sucks up his livelihood and i'm trudging over it he'd not like it should i squash a foot-wide swath through his oats they're slim in stalk and nibbles in a cluster neat and symmetrical i always marvel the plants close up in patterns five point stars some of them in this field a billion kernels basking sunning bending the wind bending them i'll lie down in them i will/tactile prickly stubs i'm hidden in the crop in the great grown crop yellow and green the oat ends are bloody hard they're only annual i think the tree that would grow larger must send its roots down deeper this is grass between the oat stalks here now is a tree treeing and back there's the fence fence-ing if i want existence to be or not to be a predicate i see the furrows on the plowed land regular like a grid hidden under the crop these plants with roots like hooks linking them to the nourishment of the shallow soil beneath the rock beneath the soil the sediment from settling in seas Devonian all on top of rolling crusts rolling on molten molten rock floating all back and forth on the globe as a pivot these little string-straight oats anchored like dinghy-tubs to the rock dusted into soil the wind and water making change, change

incessant change forms forming into forms these string-straight oats a
 sea of them i see them as a movement a broad movement sitting here ob-
 scured by a million toothpick stalks the other furious plants are out
 they want to reclaim/ this tiny shoot shoving micro-boulders aside it
 wants the sun like trees, saplings, grass, hay, vegetables, spices, flow-
 ers, weeds weeds weeds wee mice rabbits at the fringes cows horses hon-
 eybees goats snakes dogs bobcats skunks prissy porcupines owls adamant
 jays coons robins sparrows muskrats weasels lynx tigers lurking behind
 oat stalks i walk on them again they're brittle in late August cereal
 brittle blades will swathe them down like whiskers everything too late
 to clamber in when the snow comes back and spring the farmer's back to
 fallow it all renew the soil blood they never have a chance to catch

the roots

*for many years
 he fished for a great vision
 dangling the hooks of sown
 roots under the surface
 of the shallow earth*

the field

is endless walking in the field is endless walking is endless don't hear
 the cars the rubber on pavement the wind and wuthering waving anchored
 stalks of oats in neat rows from exquisite perspectives walking north
 and west toward the Maitland River i'll hit the Maitland eventually and
 come out like a settler at a townsite the water is my highway Maitland
 Menesetung HE WHO SAILS WELL ON WATER friendliness neat ways they had to
 name names i'm Menesetung Menesetung i'm sailing well or watering i'm
 FORDING i'm Ford Percy Giffening across a field of oats near the highway
 i am my existence is a predicate i can do nothing more than Ford Percy
 Giffen/ to F.P. Giffen: a name-predicate i can't bite my own teeth i can
 not see my own eyes but i can see the image of my eyes i might use mir-

fence fence fence fence fence fence fence fence fence fence fence fence
up and over the weeds are weazling through the barbs the cows can't con-
quer they're prisoners their brains won't get them rebelling raging aga-
inst the slaughter the men yanking their teats making purses from their
calves guts they don't know they say but the ball peen hammer hollow
whump hoisted up to a rail near the ceiling *it's mainly because of the*
meat legs up head hanging limply down a right hand cutting the cow's
throat carefully without splashing itself the blood to a bucket full full
crimson froth on top like candy floss they're languid lolling like con-
demned fools around a salt block with eroded scoops they're licking at
its budgeted surface/candy for the kids the calves don't know when to
quit licking granular i remember as a kid LarryEddy i licked the cows'
salt block and busted it to blue bits the cows hate chomping salt lumps
they want to lick it smooth: gets into their meat into their milk into
their pies all over the field i'll not step in a new one warm and even

like a discoloured pumpkin pie if i step in one it'll hide in the
 perpendicular between my heel and my sole and stink like shit there
 after days of drying i'll pry at it with my fingernail it'll colour me
 brown some fields swim with them this field has been spared am i heading
 due north northwest with the spores seeds sperms of the air ° ° ° ° ° °
 °or °am i back to the road back to the road my journey without maps i
 can °°see the road veering off diagonally from me i'm forty-five degree
 eeeeees °i'm degrees forty-five and moving the cows near by path Eddy
 hated °cows wanted to prove my bet he'd never ride a cow he rode a cow
 and fell °off i won't admit i'm hurt H.U.R.T. it's true i'm busted up my
 °arm's busted up my arm's shattered *what were you doing he's busted up?*
 in the fie°ld many adventures happen the cows ignore me i see one Eddy
 was a fool °for bets he bet he'd take Patty's pants up to see her cut
 cut i said, ° cut? what a name they call it cunt when you're bigger,
 n-n-no, cut c°u°t you've never seen a cut i have too seen one Elaine's
 and her tits like brown knobs under her nightgown she played with my
 wiener once why does it get hard all the time when you think of some-
 thing dirty a little hard wiener you mean they stick it in and make
 abble-babble babies? with bulls it's different with their paws on the
 cow's belly pumping pumping keep pumping it'll come sitting eating
 Russets Baldwins Greenings Northern Spies Ben Davis Delicious McIntosh
 under one lone tree the cows ate all the goddam grass and under the
 tree it's barren like a golf course even the cow pies sticking out like
 mushrooms the cow pies watching for the cow pies in the dark the cows
 are late to be out their udders plugged up by neglect busting with un-
 homogenized milk unpasteurized milk mother's tits are for milk i've

seen my mom's milkers only once old Sebastian was chawing on them but apart from that never she's so careful even when she bends over to hold her blouse closed can't see the big hanging mounds oh you'd say she was stacked, oh Eddy she's stacked better'n your maw anyday but Ford how's your father hung? i've never seen it but at the beach one day he changed behind the car door it was too far away the ground here is too rocky picking rocks .85 an hour there are easier ways to get money rocks gorgeous rocks growing like weeds weeds and rocks as enemies: *Part One-The Weed and Rock as Vital to the Cycle. Part Two-Rocks as Stubbers. Part Three-Weeds as Thistles as Pricklers of Toes and Biped Soles. Part Four-Weeds and Rocks Nibbled and Nudged and the Land Never Noticing* explicitly how no stasis is its lot endless becoming endless forming shading from one thing to another all the offs and ons, the darks and lights, the softs the hards, bing-bong, zip-zap, day-night, cold-hot no stasis the incessant rolling around between the extremes the earth is green only because it is brown/alive because it is going to die both at once and both all some festival that instant opposites in harmony of being opposites and seem flowing in and out in tide

down off the road i'm crazy the whole technology hailing me mechanical advantage is no sin NO SIN there's land there's you there's also your chance your one chance your life to touch what you are in the here the now and i'm here and now it's mine all here and now the field spreading like a carpet the sky protecting it the darkening sky over the constant land changing constantly i see the grass old like a hoary-headed MAN i see the rocks left by ice a thousand feet high pleistocene glaciation made it for southwestern ontario farming if you want to talk

about farming down off the road i'm crazy the whole concrete trail
 hailing me back but i'm heading for the river i'm going to swim to
 Colme the whole way to Elizabeth's house and into her toilet bowl i'll
 emerge like Aladdin with a single wish for a million more wishes to
 beat that system i'll get caught in the Auburn generator and spread out
 to infinity in the electricity grid and burn the filament in the bulb
 above her bed you watched him die 'Liz great stepmaw congratulations
 on your nuptial knot in a dark wood where the straight way was lost
 there am i working hard and my bowels are open old Ern didn't send any
 money my bowels are open the cows' bowels are open all day long leaving
 pies for me to walk on the field near this fence has fewer pies oil
 cedar posts wire's galvanized barbs to rip a hole in the ass of my
 pants to tear the cow's skin it wants to get out to get out because the
 fence's a prison they don't know it's a prison the fence like the iron
 curtain keeps in and keeps out at night in the darkness the fields in
 vain with fences keeping out keeping in it all gets in the barbs catch
 my pants and rip them off RIP THEM OFF i need to feel the setting sun
 slanting on my skin i'll spread my legs and let the sun shove its light
 up my anus i'll submit i'll submit if i can watch the ball of fire squat
 into the horizon and the stars come out like speckles like twinkles grass
 is thicker between the ruts in this land the fence ahead promises me a
 tangle of trees the lane meandering toward the sun the red sun urging
 me on like a squatting prostitute light hinting warm i mean to walk into
 it a ways and farther from the road only eight or nine miles a measley
 eight or nine to Colme a measley three hours walk eight or nine minutes
 to Colme the time is so short relatively I'LL AIM FOR ELIZABETH'S HOUSE

HOW CLOSE CAN I COME HOW CLOSE CAN I COME pow like a bullet? let Fordy
 come over red light green light caught ya take two baby steps I SAID
 TWO GODDAM BABY STEPS drop dead i'm telling mommy button button who's
 got the button oohh a belly button take six hundred giant steps and
 drop off a cliff i'm not playing anymore spoil sport Elaine, n'ya n'ya
 we're Cadillacs and you're dirty put-puts i'll aim it good and win
 the game come out right on Number 86 one hell of a detour DEE TOUR TRU
 DA damn fine fields where da remnants are i'll find our fort by the
 river we were heroes FORD's captain today! we'll make like Tommy Sawyer
 and float up home to Colme the poling's harder'n we ever figured ditched
 the oil drums and boards on the shore the river's so far away i don't
 know how many miles i haven't got a map the lane's gonna end me up at
 some property line some bulls're gonna snort one of 'em's gonna snort
 his snout i'll watch out for him they look at you with fire and match
 your pace if there's a fence between you or trees cat and mouse bull
 and you the bull thinks he'll jam his rammerupper up yer ass you fear
 the little horns they're sharper'n razors Eddysdad says and means it
 we run run run who looks back Eddy falls of course and skins his knees
 the damn rocks nobody picks rocks anymore they come up through the
 ground he told me they grow but the frost pushes them up they pop out
 like eggs from a hen's womb i've never seen a cock lay a hen i've seen
 a hen lay an egg i've seen a pigeon lay a pigeon they balance beautiful-
 ly flutter flutter oooHHH he flies off her and Eddy told me and showed
 me before i believed it i didn't believe it the man shoots SPERM °°? in
 there?°°°°°°into the woman's cut you're crazy how does it get there
 then the baby i never thought about the cause how it gets there then i

learned to figure out the causes it wasn't causes before then just
 the rocks came out like eggs when the frost went we found them in the
 spring and there they were/ *no iconography of science* to mar the magic
 of the just-there the rocks nobody picks anymore just there

How long can this lane go on? this lane with two ruts in it?
 leads to a fence by god it's a fence at the end i see a fence there
 where the lane ends Jesus fence blocking the goddam lane but if i head
 north northwest i have to come to the river i have to come to the river
 and the river seeks its own level frontier wisdom for the frontierless
 generation Auburn generator blocked up a mile of it no seeking its own
 level anymore no sweet level seeking on its own it's a damn fence to
 keep the cows on the parts planned for them what's left to explore i can
 walk through here for days and find fences/ nowhere to run or hunt even
 trails have fences beside them on earlier journies they followed rivers
 now under numb skies we must follow fences trapped in cars by imaginary
 horizontal concrete fences or on lanes by barbed wire i'm going to eas-
 ier latitudes the Amazon where men live by dark tangled green without
 straight clean fences following longitudes to the sea on one side the
 mountains on the other but no damn fences like a chessboard xoxoxo/ where
 the hell are the cows they'd appreciate fences to guide them to their
 stalls for to say we have conquered and won is to say we've led our-
 selves to our stalls we can't leave them but the cows back there are
 out they're not attached to a milking machine stainless steel pumping
 out the milk for silverwood's am i in a system of milk drinkers? i'm a
 walker on the land and going to the river to Colme home the fence blocks
 my north north west/ i can't see past the fence line of trees i see the

elms dying against the red, sentries they've got clenched hands and rigid feet gaping mouth bowels crawling with worms i see i see i see i SEE SEE i want to feel the trees to my fingers i need to smell the bark i'll eat it and savour the chunks under my tongue like a candy CONTACT by taste-- you ain't had it till you've ate it Nort you're nuts it's disgusting lap lap it out Ford you'll love poon-tangin' wait'll you meet "Licker" i tell you taste is where it's real i tell you where it's real you haven't lived till your gums are soft with poonperfume tanging and dripping down your throat ringing your tonsils with slim like slime nothing bottled i tell you can match it straight off there's no comparison/the EVERLASTING FENCE! barbs'll grip my denim and trap me here again i'll be a successfully achieved corpse on a fence my bleached bones rattling at cows with swollen udders my corpse making them sniff i'll be certain to stink it up when i get to be a stiff [no sitting shivah wake fancy funeral for me]

Doctor, doctor will I die?

disposal by exposal/disposal by artificial decomposition, EXPOSURE, disposal by decomposition WHAT/ON EARTH WILL EVER THEY DO WITH A FENCED CORPSE grave goods are rare goods in fields away from towns Hopi people'd run away afraid of the newly dead[quickly over best forgotten] i want a green funeral cremate me and feed me to the trees

Does a calvarium make a superior ashtray?

i need a doctor here on my fence doctor high priest of health and beauty forever, get this goddam barbed wire out of my crotch

Do many pathogenic bacteria remain alive in the body after death? No, most of them . . .

[get the barb out of my sperm count for Christ sake]

die with the host

last seen alive crotched on a fence the cows came home while he hung there three days and three nights the commital chamber wouldn't have him the cremating room couldn't stand the smell the columbarium closed for alterations

--last seen alive?

--seen/not senile, seen after death . . .

--your diagnosis[professional, of course: on the record]

--coronary atheroma, myocardial fibrosis, hypertension, chronic bronchitis, coronary thrombosis, iron deficiency anaemia, cerebral catastrophe, a cow stepped on his head while he hung on a barbed wire fence at the end of a farmer's lane on his way across country to Colme when he should have taken the bus: after all, he DID have a ticket!

--my observation, doctor, is that while we watch this fence-crotched body disassemble it becomes clear to me that the body can be divided for analysis into two main parts: the bony framework. This is composed chiefly of calcium phosphate, the soft tissues -- those which contain carbon, being the second main part; I mean of course the proteins, carbohydrates, fats and water, which constitute 70-80% of the total weight of soft tissues!

--Do they burn the coffins in cremation?

--Shh! let's watch him quiver on his fence

on my fence i wonder should i turn my head towards Mecca would the passing cows understand would the fence understand

Bless me father for I have sin . . .

--Osteology, doctor, as far as I can tell, is the study of bones, syndesmology the study of ligaments or joints, angiology the study of vessels, neurology the study of nerves, myology the study of muscles, splachnology the study of viscera . . .

--viscera/viscera?

--organs

--oh! organs

--DOES a calvarium make a superior ashtray?

--Shh! please; in the case of protracted fence
sitting in this business of dying, indolent
ulcers must be cleaned, draining wounds dressed,
fetid mouths tended, fecal impactions removed . . .

--yech!

--it's a living

--Please answer me, DOES a calvarium . . .

--honestly; is that a professional question?

--well, DOES it?

--who wants to know?

--My wife is redesigning our guest room.

--bones are: long -- humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia,
fibula, metacarpals, metatarsals, phalanges, clavical.
short -- carpals, tarsals. flat -- occipital, frontal,
scapula, innominate, sternum, ribs. irregular -- tem-
poral, sphenoid, ethmoid, malar, superior and inferior
maxillary, vertebrae . . .

--not bad for the accidental collocations of atoms

i'm going to be stuck here until the end of time OUCH blasted damn barbs
when i consider the time of this delay the end of my days seems closer
though i'm far less anxious: the age of the earth is supposed to be two
thousand years to three thousand million years and if that's equal, the
three thousand million, to twenty-four hours the appearance of life on
earth did not take place until 10:51 p.m. the appearance of man a mere
twenty-two seconds before midnight and the whole of world history great
empires up and down great religions up and down art music science dis-

coveries INVENTIONS took place in the last three-tenths of a second i
 shall persevere this barb in my crotch reach gently lift slide it out
 FREE

fucken fence

i'm tired already of fields i'm tired of fences more than i'm tired of
 fields i'm not seeing farther than a mile the dusk is piling up on top
 of me the silence and the shadows are longer i knew it i can't hear any
 birds i can't hardly hear no birds at all or cows or wind in the leaves
 there is truth in silence passive and slumbering IN PARTIBUS INFIDELIUM

EEEEEEEEEEYOOOOOOOWWWWWWWWWWeee

silence sinks weighted down into its own darkness i'm off my fence man
 between silence and speech in my field i'm here and now it's mine all
 here and now but in the golden age men understood the language of all
 animals trees flowers grasses i can't understand anything my words are
 a quiver full of steel arrows slicing up the forest into fields into
 fences the birth of words from silence led to fences from the periodical
 quietness in the flow of human history from silence into the world the
 seasons moving in silence through the changing year it all came silently
 i'm all alone in this field silently running foot after foot after
 foot after ter ter ter ter foooooooooootttttttt fooottttttiiiinnnnngggggg
 it across the field i need the sun more than i need silence and fences/
 the unreasonable silence of the land it won't touch me and take me to
 it i've made it bitter and resentful i masturbated on the land on boul-
 ders and came back a day later and the semen was gone° evaporated° into
 the air my progeny unacceptable alone on the surface of life on the sur-
 face of this life-infested rock°x°x°x°x°y° the air is wind when i run

and run and run across fields through the air on the land the soil
 breathing they say i'm sure it does i don't like being alone in this
 big barracks of a field at dusk you bloody goddam fool across a field
 when the road was there straight to Colme for you to run you're in a
 wrong era tackling the land like that running through it running run-
 ning running running running running running running running Eddyi ran
 the school cross country we smoked after the second marker and got
 back last stinking of cigarettes ran ran between classes oh pardon me
 Miss MaGuiggan i didn't mean to run into your body i dinna mean to
 run in the halls to catch up to my friend CAN I HELP IT IF I HATE THIS
 PLACE? pardon me Sister Oliva i mean i dinna mean to bump into you i'm
 running you see to get to the bus stop to go home it's four o'clock and
 i really don't like it here you see Sister Oliva's face silent angry red
 outlined in white with a dislodged wimple

It's getting dark the cloud up there like a balloon on a sky hook
 the BALLOONMAN distributing his balloons all over the fields B.M. let-
 ting them go at the corner i let it go at the corner Bloor and Yonge sss
 sprung skyward first quickly then gradually dangling its string after
 moving up at an angle like a rocket might losing its color and say it's
 getting smaller darker as it heads northwest i'm heading northwest north-
 west northwest bottom of the cloud's darker'n the top of the cloud's like
 a balloon suspended there ethereal i see it i see it 7:15 it's light yet
 i know till 9 at least and August dark is inky in fields EddyLarryi camp-
 ing in inky August fields running naked in night in moonlight leaping in-
 to the river spuuullllaaassssshhhhhh it echoes at night the sounds all ag-
 gravated EddyLarryi only EddyLarry dunking me you creeps leave me beeee!

skinnydipping can be fun at night swinging from the maple from a rope out over the river spuuuuulllassssHHHH FORD BE CAREFUL EddyLarry mocking her FORD BE CAREFUL whining plunging into the water to get away from me jumping out naked when Elaine came out shocking her all to hell ain't ya never seen wieners before, ain't ya, uh, huh, ain't ya? leave her alone you guys she'll get mad at me and get me in trouble it's almost dark my maw'll make me come in SHUT UP YOU GUYS OR I'LL GET MAD i know till 9 it's light in inky August JEEESUS it's so quiet out here this field's bigger there's a road beyond that bunch of trees clump of bush hardwood bush wind breaker trees before the road running i'll come to a road again before i come to the river no true pioneer taking the easiest route fool they took the easiest route the water route, trees hanging over tracks through the forest like demons, damp humid demons old operatic Mephistopheles growing in silence through the seasons leaves exploding out of them in silence in the spring/summer/fall they are waiting for fellows in passage the leaves are breathing in/out in colour in green off'n on ring after ring ---seasons---after seasons if there's a fence running through the middle of this woodstand i'll be pissed off no clear walking over ANY land anymore fences and barricades things sticking up all over the place no path of least resistance everything chequered off like town plans longitude and latitude making everything relate to everything proportionally no fringe of darkness anymore just these trees sticking out like collars on a coat thick fur collars on a furless coat some kind of paltry trim they're oaks and maples bless them clearing granddaddies for leavin' 'em darker in here good goddam darker in here some Chippewa warrior's going to jump out from

behind the tree and lift my scalp some Iroquois lurking to catch a Huron
 to take his waters and forests oh there'll be Crees Listenos, Cris-
 teneau, Maskegons, Ojibwas, Potawotomis, Winnebagoes behind every tree
 every tree's got a warrior ghost ready to catch white farmers and land-
 crossers eagles soaring around overhead think they must be their spies
 waiting for invaders from the plowed fields white men like angels with
 tigers after them in oat fields bulls after them in lanes land-crossers
 all they're waiting to pounce as well they might we brought the courts
 to settle in the forests and pumped our gunge into the sparkling waters
 Menesetung loved till Ernie died of the European disease like an elm the
 trees are so dark shadows so blacking i'm in them they're darkening me
 i expect to hear howls through the wooden walls i feel cooled didn't
 realize i'm so hot from running an immense weariness in my arms and legs
 i'm so near a road i know it's through the trees so short a way these
 trees cooling me soothing me i want to rest in them for a time i'm so
 inclined but i'm through them in a flash it's a flash i see the gravel
 of the road and another fence between through the top and middle lines
 squeezing to keep the barbs out of my clothes to keep free of fences they
 rip shreds in my clothes and scratch blood out of my skin the gravel
 chest high i'm in the ditch climbing up and on the road trees a woodlot
 bushlot on the other side too and north i go to the right of the setting
 sun it slithers through the trees red streaked black i'm walking so far
 to get to Colme funny i won't let the funeral fill me at a distance it
 won't fill me what am i waiting for i'm not waiting for anything wait-
 ing for death let's face it waiting for death he's dead i'm going to
 see the body like parchment on a slab how foolish TRACES Elaine, said

Elaine quote: traces said Jarry said he found traces and the traces
 aren't necessarily malignant the bashed head heals the knee heals
 the sliced meat in his belly heals the cancer clinks and slinks
 around for two years and kills him anyway Elizabeth bloody fool to
 take him in like a patient she'd cling to any permanence any shield
 from the dark and loneliness fearful foolish people face it face it
 face it there's nothing but one flash of unique self among all the
 passing fellows aha! patient takes pills to keep the clay bowels
 functioning pills to kill the pain chunking out his marrow sweet old
 pills to keep it all flowing patient sweats like a pig at night patient
 even tries to take Elizabeth his sour breaking breath stenching all
 over his cock as brittle as dry turd patient and there are moments he
 faces the void faces it square NOOOOOOO the blood curdles in veins
 where the muscles are lapsed his systems breaking down he screams for
 sweet waters sweet embrocations elixirs healers I BELIEVE I BELIEVE
 I BELIEVE only hallowed healer heal my body it's not ready for the
 void the gravel an endless supply from the back of some truck that
 went before i'm on a hundred ton road leads north north to my dead dad
 i'm scraping my leather soles on and on he lies there on and on memories
 holy streams trickling pure streams from the gushing grinding past gone
 by he's profuse with wet the fatigue of withered muscles settling over
 him by minutes NO STAYING POWER sir your jig is UP i'm walking he's
 waiting who knows when it ends the dust grimy on myfrontmyback ALL my
 teeth i always marvel at the dust conquered by sour saliva gushing from
 my cheeks to smooth the enamel my legs and hips heavy shall i rest a
 time find some soft ditch to curl in some soft ditch to lay and watch

the sky shading from dark blue to grey blue to grey my body curling around the lumps and creases in the ground cool grass against the drift some dusklike way and see the little hillsides of the ditch rising like the sides of a grave beside me up to the gravel road up to the trees on the other side the sky above me protecting like a mother i'll close my eyes and the sky grey-blue like a mother fringes of red flashing to the right my eyes bending to the right and closing the cold endurable for a few moments, for a few moments, only a few moments . . .

THAT SIR was a taken plot, just you wait and see we'll prove without a reasonable doubt that THAT was a taken plot you squatted on laid on in the ditch indeed to fall asleep, weary you say? weary? "let's go pussyfooting here," we're sure you said, and DON'T SLIP BACK INTO YOUR DREAM, WE'RE NOT THROUGH WITH YOU YET lying there shivering like a corpse before its time in the ditch of tacamahac and sprayed hay, you CLUB-FOOTED FOOL WHY CHOOSE THAT TAKEN PLOT?

FORD: How was I to know, I mean, a six foot length of ditch ten miles long! You expect too much! Besides I'm sleeping.

[VOICE]: WOULD YOU LIKE SOME UPROCTED UPPITY KID TO PLOP ON TOP OF YOUR GRAVE?

FORD: But how was I to know it was *your* grave?

[VOICE]: YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED ON THE ROAD. I heard you coming anyway. I was afraid this would happen.

FORD: Who are you?

(the corpse sits up directly in front of me; hides a magazine behind its back)

FORD: Colby? COLBY!

COLBY:[with precaution] Shh! For fuck sake you want to wake the dead;
They're all over the place around here.

FORD: What are you doing *here*? You don't belong *here*!

COLBY: I'll say I don't. Listen, I'm not exactly in raptures rotting around a host of dead warriors. You need a tour, I tell you. Listen here, I've got two Chippewas, three Hurons, four Mississaugas, five Crees, six Ojibwas, seven Potawotomis, eight Ottawas, nine Miamis, ten Nipissings, eleven Amikwas, and twelve Eries in my section of the ditch; all in the same ditch stretched six foot lengths end on end and YOU, sir, took a taken plot; MINE, to lie down on.

FORD: I'm sorry; I didn't know.

COLBY: YOU DIDN'T KNO-O-O-O-W-W ? You? I should think YOU above all others should know.

FORD: Why should I know?

COLBY: Book learnings; that's why you should know. Fools that dumped all that gravel to make a road how could they know they were dumping rock on graves, *Indian* graves. We were all mad last week when the grader went through. We're all mad every week when it goes through.

FORD: Are there only Indians here?

COLBY: *Only*.

FORD: Then why are you here?

COLBY: I've been hired as a caretaker, guide and resident interpreter.

FORD: I don't understand.

COLBY: You never understand. Must I always SPELL things out for you? Haven't you got a FEEL for anything?

FORD: Colby, *please*, I don't understand. What are you doing here?
What is this place, really?

COLBY: Come with me.

(his voice whispering huskily; i see his *Ramparts* magazine written in Cree)

*I gave it to Cuttle
Right up her tuttle*

(i follow him down the ditch, three Indians in ceremonial dress are sitting in a semi-circle; Colby makes me sit before them, pushes me down by pressing on my shoulders; i look them over; they're wearing animal skins oily looking stitched together with laces of rawhide or sinew or something, and beads all over; there's a dog haunched behind them drooling and chawing on a bone with red meat bloody i can't help notice their teeth are yellowy, skin parchment-like, wrinkled, brown)

*your stomach turns a slimy green
and pus comes out like whipping cream
you slap it on a piece of bread
and THAT'S what you eat when you are dead*

(Colby continues to sing his ditties. The Indian in the centre who wears an enormous bonnet smiles at Colby whom i can't see behind me; Colby stops singing right away)

MIDDLE INDIAN: Where'd you pick up this soapy sneak?

COLBY: [from behind] He was sleeping on my plot.

MIDDLE INDIAN: Did he step on any other plots?

COLBY: [meekly, defensively, suddenly alarmed] No, no master, only mine.

FORD: Master? Col', are you gone nuts?

MIDDLE INDIAN: SILENCE!

RIGHT INDIAN: You're sure he only trod on your sod?

COLBY: Would I lie?

(all three Indians break into compulsive, thunderous laughter, churning up gurgling up phlegm and mucous in their chests, coughing some up, letting it hang from their lips, like dribbled snot)

MIDDLE INDIAN: In any case, he has violated the treaty.

FORD: What treaty?

MIDDLE INDIAN: SILENCE!

COLBY: He genuinely does not know explicitly what treaty.

MIDDLE INDIAN: No matter. There are lots to choose from; he breaks at least one of them by just being around.

COLBY: [shuddering, shrinking] Master, I had best admit I am prejudiced and biased in the matter of this young man.

MIDDLE INDIAN: [frowning severely] Yesssss?

COLBY: [earnestly] We were fine friends once.

FORD: Once?

COLBY: [shakes his head as if bored; croaks like a horse] Yes, WERE, WERE, were, and WERE; and I'm never so sure even WERE!

FORD: HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT? I PAID TWO-THIRDS OF YOUR FINE AND I'VE NEVER ASKED FOR A NICKEL BACK.

COLBY: Yes, WERE, I do believe.

FORD: COLBY, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

MIDDLE INDIAN: STUFF HIS MEALY MOUTH!

(Colby pulls a red scarf around my mouth i cry out the pain it yanks the skin of my cheeks too far back)

LEFT INDIAN: [impassioned] These Europeans are so steeped in what they think to be their inalienable right to our sweet land they forget we and we alone have the gods on our side.

COLBY: Can I explain master so that he will understand?

RIGHT INDIAN: In twenty-five words or less or more, you may, and don't try lying.

COLBY: [embraces me from behind] My dear friend, the Indian knows we'll kill ourselves off by pollution, overpopulation, neurosis, psychosis, thrombosis, and extinction of resources. When we die off they'll be ready to take over. They'll be the only humans able to survive the transition from the stench of dead technology to the blossoms of the renewed land.

MIDDLE INDIAN: [coldly] Fifty-seven words! Make a note of that.

FORD: [i turn around questioningly to Colby] Uhn?

COLBY: [solemnly] They know our words are numbered; they're keeping track.

LEFT INDIAN: [smiles superciliously on me] What kind of track record has he got?

COLBY: [shouts] No plants grown since he tended his mother's garden in the late fifties as a tiny boy. No prayers offered since the early sixties.

MIDDLE INDIAN: [with a sinister smile] Bring in his mother.

(my mother is there! she is angelic, face radiant and calm, hands folded across her lap; does not appear to know me)

FORD: [i struggle to get to her] Muhhhnn! Uhn!

MIDDLE INDIAN: RESTRAIN HIM.

COLBY: Please be generous with your patience, master; they parted on sad sounds, bad tones, lost lights.

RIGHT INDIAN: [nods] Umm.

MIDDLE INDIAN: [to my mother] Describe.

KATHERINE: [her eyes closed, with a voice of flowing water]

He could not come to me bound we were to our bodies so private we could not caress and we could not bless our bond by love we could not bless our bond by faithful growth in seasons I knew him as a baby so much energy in his little frame so much interest for the world in his little eyes we would sit by the river by night by day the maple near us he would see it and feel the spirit in it I would give him a little leaf to play with he loved the soft green of it but he grew away from the soft leaf its veins and magic colours by seasons silent without noise or explanation he and I grew separate my womb no longer any special refuge for his memories I grew to hate him his alliances, his words, his books, his women, not of our home, always the others, the others more important than our home; he was generous though in his passion for his loved ones generous and sad burdened by the ennui of his generation by the malaise of his peers and by the fences . . . he took the words, the cautious calendars, the maps of idea and act the plans of thought and feeling reason and imagination and let them pass along his time all as two streams never meeting but never parallel they ruled him so in the confusion of his alternatives . . .

LEFT INDIAN: [makes ornery cat's eyes; elbow in his hand, forefinger against his temple]

Did he or did he not grow anything after he became a man?

KATHERINE: [her head lowers sadly] He did not.

COLBY: May I kindly, masters, interject. I fear for my friend's fate at this point. I must remind you that the Indian did not always grow anything either.

MIDDLE INDIAN: Neither did he wrench the land from its mother, neither did our people wring from her the answers to riddles only gods can know.

COLBY: But may I kindly, masters, interject. There IS another way of seeing it, of seeing the land, the world as conquerable and subjectable to a will to power.

MIDDLE INDIAN: BLASPHEMY!

COLBY: You can't blaspheme if you don't believe.

LEFT INDIAN: You vex us with your defences, all vulgar logic.

(turns to Katherine)

Did he love a woman and fill her with his children?

KATHERINE: [weakly] I don't know.

LEFT INDIAN: Enough then. Return.

(my mother sinks into the ground; i struggle to stop her, reaching at her, my hands slashing through air, she is AIR; the Indians laugh compulsively again)

MIDDLE INDIAN: Bring in his woman.

(Valerie appears in bra and panties; eyes closed, rising out of the ground, holding a bank book in her right hand; opens her eyes, glances around, her eyes coming to rest on me)

Did he love you, woman, and fill you with his children?

VALERIE: [screams] Christ, no!

FORD: Mnnnnn!

COLBY: He lived with her in part for the hell of it, in part so as not to be lonely, in part to let a woman pay him the price of her insecurity, in part to have some consistency in his continuum, I mean, shit, you should have seen him when he came back and his old lady had just croaked, drowned. I'm about to blow this young buck when he pounds on my door, can't go home, he says; I love him like my own and let laddy boy go home for another day and take Fordy boy in and harbour him like my own and he stays a week; four times phone calls from Sebastian, three times from Elaine, twice from his Uncle Robb, once from his Aunt Paula. I tell them all every time he's not around; tell him to come to the funeral they say. I say yes I'll pass it on. They don't understand. He only weeps. I watch him,

caress him; he's in need of my affection. From that he emerges and latches on to her. He eats, sleeps, reads, thinks. Doesn't leave my room except to go to the can, to the kitchen. Cuttle comes; she won't spend much time with him, she's got boyfriends all over, but especially some guy from out west. She doesn't need any consistent relationship, she says. So one so introspective and demanding as Ford Giffen gets pressed by that and when she comes in, OH does she come in, but she doesn't send any love at him; oh yeah, she holds him, even balls him, but by the end of the week he's clean of her, knows she won't allow anything lasting. He's lonely, oh so deeply lonely. Moves back home, all alone. Bloody mess there. Elaine's moving back to Colme, house's back up for rent, his father's in Wellesley crankin' through a stew of operations; so Fordy here gets a room on Church Street, sixteen bucks a week, lives like a hermit. I see him off and on; he digs his studies, reading history like easy novels. He doesn't spend much energy on women. I'm not surprised he harnassed her.

VALERIE: [sarcastically] I was indecently treated. He called me Hela all the time.

MIDDLE INDIAN: We too know of Asgard and his heroes. But there is salvation in one pure, unsullied act of heroism. Our Valhalla is no Purgatory.

VALERIE: Well, he just dumped himself on me but he made me feel good again, wanted again. I was so awed and also so intimidated by his knowledge; he's so high. What can I do, he leaves his toothbrush and razor in my bathroom; we should get a place together he says and it makes me so happy to be getting into his life. So I left McDougall Lane. Oh, there were some days I wanted his babies in me; I wanted proud strong brainy babies in me; who cares about how many or how we can pay for them-I want them! But he never gives me anything to hold on to; there's nothing to hold on to in this world he says, there's nothing to count on. But I want to let myself go with him. I want to fill myself up with him, I want to marry him. We had good times together. He took me to work the first day, pinched my breasts like this . . . and I grabbed his cock [Middle Indian nods]. He used to kiss my long hair. But soon he was doing nothing but his stupid thesis, his stupid books. He ran out of money he was late getting done at the University. I don't want to give them my soul, he keeps telling me. That's

fine, I tell him, when it's me who's gotta pay that Annis rent now. But when he was tender, oh I could kiss him so close, hold him all over, but no, he doesn't feel it like I feel it, tells me my world view is lumpy like horse buns, tells me I need to study to get my mind in gear; oh I'm not about to wait for him forever. Christ, Weaver pays more attention to me than he does. Weaver's got a hard-on just standing near me; Ford, he's about as horny as a eunuch. I'm running out of time, though; I need to know, I need to know what's ahead for us. I need to know he'll keep me with him but I know I can't hold onto him so hard he'll turn more to stone; he doesn't like me to smother him. He's so mad when I bring it up. He got so quiet. I guess I'm waiting. I'm waiting because for the moment I have no one else to go to, nowhere else to go; there's nowhere to go, no sure place to go, no place anywhere . . .

RIGHT INDIAN: [unblinking] Unbind his mealy mouth.

(Colby takes off the red scarf that's pulling my jaw down my throat; i gag when he loosens the knot)

Why did you not guide this woman to a
finality so she could know what her life
can mean?

FORD: Finality?

LEFT INDIAN: She needs to know. All men need to know.

FORD: Need to know what?

MIDDLE INDIAN: That there is a place, a meadow in the forest for
all men.

FORD: But there are no places a man can find any more. There are
no meadows. There are no finalities.

MIDDLE INDIAN: So we see again the European disease.

COLBY: May I kindly interrupt, masters, again. There is another way
of seeing it; of seeing the land, the world as conquerable and
subjectable to a will to power.

MIDDLE INDIAN: There is no power over the land. There is only power
with the land.

RIGHT INDIAN: [unblinking] Why did you not guide this woman to a
finality so she could know what her life
can mean?

FORD: I am afraid to trust anything. I have no faith, no vision.

RIGHT INDIAN: Precisely.

FORD: [urgently] I don't mean religious faith.

LEFT INDIAN: We know your word 'faith', your word 'vision'.

RIGHT INDIAN: [takes out his notebook] "*and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil*" -- isn't that what you occidentals believe? That's your faith, in unlinked opposites?

MIDDLE INDIAN: [strikes the Right Indian across the mouth with the flat of his palm]

FOOL! [turns to me] It is settled. You have no finality. You have no power with the land, the air, the water. And you have no power over them. Your woman watches you and waits for you to learn, for you to find her. There is so little left for you white Europeans to do. There is no living fire in your destiny.

COLBY: [whispers to me from behind] It's all a dream you know; I always thought she was a bitch.

FORD: I thought you did.

MIDDLE INDIAN: And do you agree?

VALERIE: Yes, do you agree?

LEFT INDIAN: Yes, do you agree?

RIGHT INDIAN: Yes, do you agree? Do you agree *there is no living fire in your destiny?*

(all four together, arm in arm, dance around me; their faces peer down on me, grinning)

Yes, yes, we all agree you see
You loathe this lady Valerie

FORD: No, no, I *don't*!

(all four together, arm in arm, spinning around me in a whirlwind, their mouths open, laughing)

Yes, yes, we know, you see
You hate, you hate our Valerie

(suddenly there are five together, arm in arm, dancing around me faster and faster, their faces rolling around on their shoulders)

Yes, yes, we all agree
Valerie, Valerie, Valerie

COLBY? You too Colby?

(all five spinning, their arms waving and whirling)

Yes, yes, you used her
you bruised her
you abused her

BUT WHAT

DID

I

DO?

WHAT DID I DO?

VALERIE: [yells at me from the circling whirr]

Let me teach you to live without appeal.
Let me teach you to live with what you have.
Let me teach you your limits.
Let me teach you your adventure.

FORD: MY GOD, MY GOD, VALERIE! VALERIE!

(all five of them a blur)

HA! HA! HA! HA!

laughing over me i'm curled up there's always this soft ditch to lay in
and watch the sky shading Colby you from dark to Colby you illusion
dreaming my grey body curling around the lumps and creases in the ground
cool grass i'd close my eyes the cold not really cold merely endurable
for a few moments, for a few moments, dreaming, oh Valerie teach me,
DO teach me to live without appeal, the land is not sweet, it's indif-
ferent i'll live with what i have i have i have so little i know the
limits of my life my adventure in a ditch the ghosts of ten thousand
warriors buried under the tons of gravel Colby you prick you would be a

caretaker, guide and resident interpreter jabbing hysteria at me
 strutting your mirages at me Colby your sins lie so deep inside you
 they won't get out until your bones rot in your ditch i'm cold about to
 start decaying myself the dark is inkier dark Christ *what is my habit?*
to let any sensation any thought any word fill me; floating? study the
surface minutely down off the road heading north, north, Jesus cold
 all of a sudden but not really now it's muggy muggy humid August dusk
 past dusk dusk i'm stuck out here at dusk i could have been there god-
 dammit i could have been there but no i'll walk and hitch like some
 bloody impatient fool on this gravel road i'll look for glints of water
 through the leaves of this forest road bloody veneer of trees not thir-
 ty feet deep till some field comes up like a gnawed rind not even a
 beaming vestige of sunlight i'd swear the sky's overcast i need some
 lingering light i suppose that mirror-lined ditch damned laybrinth of
 dreams and speculations they're here they're here YOU'RE HERE this road
 gravel dark grass on your shirt you're not about to take them away you
 can't say, alas they don't exist, those trees will get back in they'll
 take over the ditch leave a road a decade be ENEMIES dense undergrowth
 you don't stumble on watery melons growing alone along forest trails
 men PLANT them they mature nurture them make the conditions favourable
 to quench a hunger and a thirst ah yes i'll not deny the gravel's under
 my plodding feet shall i scream for help or walk the whole way by Jesus
 i'll arrive at dawn all sweaty, thirsty: i'll find the town asleep and
 ring the Catholic Church bell i'll proclaim in morse the ozone's killing
 the maple next verticillium wilt you meatheads quit making your town
 grow it's smother'n the trees and i'll never find water anthracnose

trace infection, quite, cankerworm, cenopis pettitana COTTONY MAPLE
 SCALE i'll never find water out here so pure i'd drink before a tree
 processed it JEEESUS i'm thirsty this road'll never stop damn sky's
 heartless and dark and i'm supposed to ignore the growing numbness in
 my neck and arms am i i need table talk table overflowing with food
 and drink and i'll only assume the air conditioning/ well is it cold
 or is it hot i'm to walk and see

Colby you bastard you did everything those Indians told you to do
 so Valerie has to dance around in her underwear she'd use her butt to
 get a point across so i didn't fill her twat with babies you think i
 want twenty years of grief i'd hate it the kid some mewling puker wants
 what it wants when it wants it some carbon copy OOOOOOOO isn't it a
 darling NO it's a boy see its dong little small yet but if you keep
 yanking on it it'll grow wouldn't you say good grief looks like just
 like yes yes indeed does look just like Weaver doesn't it? notice
 the drooping sack can't say as i do/ well for Christ sake don't be shy
 poke around in there like everyone else does oh yes i'll fill her with
 babies for bombs to blast to smithereens for Heinz and Gerber to enum-
 erate OOOOOOOOOO here, here, don't breast feed only result your paps'll
 flap whenyourfortyishdaycomesaround PABLUM is the only way to fly but
 what about mother's milk/ odd you don't seem to remember sucking on your
 maw's cans after you grow up ME i remember hanging on to a tube and this
 big river of whitewash rushing ahead CHEAP JOKE you were only half there
 i remember poking around at this egg OH darling i do believe the egg has
 been fertilized really? delightful? we must rush off and buy a Mutual
 of Omaha baby boodle bonus plan to be sure our bundle of diapers emerges

a successful college grad now we must begin to prepare for his future
 OOOO I am so happy dear hubby that we have abandoned one generation
 and started the next that's the beginning of death is it not? why we'll
 buy only the best baby foods, the best baby clothes Tom McCann to keep
 its little feet growing and strong we must prepare our perfect expres-
 sion of our best of all possible worlds now puuUULLLLLLLEEEEEEessssee see
 to it his formula is changed regularly along with his diaper and that
 he learns to read Dr. Seuss by age three we've quite a responsibility
 i'd fill her with piss before i'd fill her with babies that'll be
 planned to their deaths *leave me alone leave me alone* let the babies
 come through me you wait like salivating vultures baby number 8001136B
 B for boy, B for bomb/ the great gyra-ting global hoax i'd string
 the bombs on Jupiter LEAVE MY BABIES ALONE i'll make a dozen women
 swell and add another twelve pairs of lungs to suck in air you trees
 can't deliver see the veneer fades the trees dribbling off to fields
 again all pruned and prim for the marketplace

suppose i crave the randomness i crave the possibilities of the
 frontier i crave a battle ah yes a battle you can't lick 'em join 'em
 you gotta join 'em time is the right time it right the rootless freedom
 BUT BUT there's freedom in the present age of movement of money of
 maudlin mannequins to please to tittilate to tease just ask and pay
 nothing is more real than nothing i'm sundered my legs and back so
 sore i'm sure i'm gonna croak, you hear, oh you trees hear me i'm
 sundered a frontierless one, sundered from nature, how far can the
 sundering go? and in a land of Quetico, Algonquin, Wood Buffalo,

Whiteshell, Riding Mountain -- what of BostonNewYorkWashington? the
 utter non-land? this IS land, land, down there we're thought to live
 in kind igloos and drafty tents: gentlemen of America, the point of
 no return officially occurred 2:22 p.m. December 22, 1922. i walk on
 country roads: scythe hour glass bow and arrow inverted torch sword
 skulls bones mummies skeletons closed books sepulchral urns vultures
 crows clocks the colour black thorns barbed wire shears swastikas rusted
 tanks fetid corpses white beards ambulances white sheets riders on pale
 horses in the middle of the country road my personal iconography of
 death i'll materialize all my horrors: Doctor i can't possibly die/
 but doctor part of being alive means being dead i mention only that i'm
 alive because someone else and something else is dead death is a WALL
 and not a doorway and life in linear progressions toward the beginning
 of eternity in linear progression toward Colme along this gravel road
 how well i know this road i turn soon

and head from northwest to due north along the great Menesetung/
 rather blunt fact, death, i see men trying to conquer death trying to
 make the systems flow diseaseless i'm certain even duskly the road
 bends west i'm north north west another fence then i'cn wait i can get
 to the bridge and/ the sun/s gone how long in the ditch? how long?
 10:15 my lonely watch like a wart on my arm 10:15 we came we saw rhy-
 thms we measured them 10:15 there IS a bridge ahead a bend a bridge
 ahead this gravel pops into my shoes like stones through melting frost
 and if i'm gonna leap KERSPLASH and swim at miracle speed stroke up up
 up the Maitland toward Colme i need two witnesses one to applaud the
 other to report

Monday

My dear Cuttle:

Do you realize you left an Olympic hopeful in the lurch? an inveterate olympic fish plowing his way fist over fist up the Maitland to Colme (six miles at least, AT LEAST) in a mere six minutes. Dear, dear Cuttle, you bruised bitch -- why was a lawyer your choice? and Regina?

Fordy-at-the-river

Wednesday

Dear darling Fordy-at-the-river:
(written in haste at breakfast)

Come and rescue me from this wilted drip. He makes love like an octopus. Shall I commit suicide? Please advise.

Cuttle and her much abused tuttle

Friday

My dear abused Cuttle:

A Requiem Mass for my Regina-bound babe. I'm rather involved in plugging along the river bank at the moment. Do jump in if marriage doesn't agree with you.

Fordy-still-at-the-river

oh indeed shall i forget my Cuttle-tuttle i shall insist in a fierce whisper here bird carry this message west to her oh dear Cuttle here are my bundled letters all that's left of our once-was i suffer from grim premonition i expect this river and the trees along the fence lines to fizzle out i do i do and factory stacks to replace them Colme's a great dark pile in the dusk past setting we used to EddyLarryi wander around here at night i can walk the risk at night it's a lolling stroll but what am i to do with you? you're in Regina, Saskatchewan pleading traffic fines while your husband licks your perfumed pudenda under your floor length barrister's gown the judge thinks you're suffering some intellectual procedural precedent deliberation consideration you're really coming all over hubby's yahoo an incurable case of crotch cricket rot itching in his moustache you really were far too promiscuous but daddy WAS waiting in Winnipeg, n'est-ce pas? you have such a probable hereafter what can i say on my river bank under the bridge down off the road with all the garbage cans and cartons around from passing cars and bulldozers? i'm heading due north i'm sorry for you? did he knock you up? rock you up? sock you up? you met with a little accident of youthful indiscretion and married as soon as could nicely be arranged a Sasky lawyer who doubles on Saturdays as a middle-class piano tuner struggling to pay off a bad seasonal cyclical investment in *United Grain Growers* may a hot sunflect ease your prairie bungalow into autumn dear Cuttle you do have a bungalow not a mere room encore une fois a mere wall by four candy pink on one side pisang-green albergo on the other?

oh your rambling indecent Fordy-at-the-river's going home to Colme all alone along the river his feet sore like a packed pecked hen's

ass he sends a worshipper's kiss after so long and marvels the Middle
 INDIAN didn't summon you but along this river bank i summon you and
 your pearly bulbous globes i can only say don't die grey and serene in
 your Regina bed before going north to Horner-Diefenbaker land and buying
 a central Sask cottage it's the forgotten wilderness YOU REMEMBER YOUR
 RESEARCH CH 430 even now who but who thinks to buy in central, northern
 Sask? the coming place i tell you from my river bank fishing for fiats
 and formulas for death you see dear daddy's dying and coming up on the
 horizon, oh yes he is i'll see him and his jaundiced chops tomorrow or
 maybe tonight i'll let the spate of after-images crowd in on me coloured
 contents guzzling multiple smashes i'll plop right into a goddam funeral
 NIRVANA so all i can do dear Cuttle is follow my river follow my river
 follow my river and even if you choose to come back i'm not sure i'd be
 up to it/ not at this time

I'll walk along my river there's no moon the sky's not black never
 black Cuttle the sun hinting at the horizon there IS an horizon when
 trees don't obscure it i'm sure a prairie sky's no finer no undulations
 always rambling undulations to obscure the protective immensity i yearn
 nevertheless for rich, old forests is no forest safe from the settlers?
 all of them clubbing back the spoonleaf sphagnum but i'll coax the
 leaves out every spring come along come along whatever else the forest
 is certain/ the trees are slow sure flyers of their epoch one hundred
 maple trees types genus classifications in the world ten indigenous to
 Canada and now i'll watch what i know become what cannot be known being
 extincted diddlings with what is by who is when is there is a physiology

a book of the machine and us the parts of a raging factory-fetched-farmland forest the aggregate new species and us, me, we, them, ALL linked little miniscules droplets jetting about the bloodstream of the machine oh dear dead dealer dad did you ever see yourself in it all backed up a way to catch a glimpse? growing up always/ oh yes, i see you pulling your wire as a boy behind the barn after spending the day selling pilfered cigarettes to farmboys yank yank oh I got 'em good OOO so good --DID you bank your bread and make a stake? alas too human dad-dio you blew it all and then some every time in and out like a mad customer the best kind the merry marketing men knew you well: back for more the Purina man in his Chrysler car, power windows sir, why certainly! my dear, dear ladyfriend i admire the slope of your belly/ may I take a bite please may i borrow your feet mine are killing my body i only want to consume what i can while i can when i can CAN is the word dear girl you'd better realize AM ABLE means not mother-may-I take five giant steps means i will i will when i can it surely does/ now drop your drawers and spread your pusilanimous pussy for your able angler to fish around in for fun how the hell am i supposed to know why i'm so preoccupied with fucking? i am equipped to penetrate: GIVEN there remains only the DEMONSTRATION which provides a circle has no beginning has no conceivable end only a centre a glorious gushing rushing centre the centre that's all that you said to her dad dealing her into peeling her skirt and girdle the world no more mysterious than the cooking of a dumpling i am here and obey anything i crave to gobble up all the world's a dumpling and all the men and women merely eaters one by two

by three by as many as i see i see i see they stick out of the ground
 along the shore like remnants i want to think of them as permanent as
 reliable old age trees plant a tree for the future of Canada of the
 world down by the river there are trees and trees and this idle path
 for pathfinder sons to follow all the way along the Maitland to No. 86
 and Colme only five miles more it must be/ any more i'd be drawn and
 destitute flopping foot by foot through the dark these miles are sucking
 the energy out of me all day walking my feet to bare brittle bone walk-
 ing Grange Park, McCaul, St. Patrick, Dundas, University Ave., Sir
 John A, are you watching me, eh? and all the highways and raceways of
 the land six lanes to the north and east and west and south i'm only
 between somewhere and the local arms of the system and uncomfortable
 trudging here heading home heading home like a pioneer along a river
 bank/ dear dad i need a boat; there's an enterprise for you an exit
 and an entrance into enterprise, a riverboat dear dealer dad with
 gay supper rooms and dancing rooms up and down the Maitland to the
 lake and back a million fast bucks you'd stagger and swagger all the
 way to the bank what a fantastic *idea scheme undertaking venture* cram
 'em in like salted fish in their barrel dear dealer dad i'll USE my
 land cleverly and all that's on it more cleverly than my contemporaries
 will praise my ingenuity and hail me god-favoured and good Henry Ford
 gave the workers of America their first real start toward affluence
 the go ahead to take what was there oh dear damn dad dealer you spent
 your life in vain what *is* this life? what one-upmanship prevails on
 my river bank, aha, it's owned it's locked stocked into the monolithic
 mammoth abstract who gets what, when, how, why SAFETY INCOME DEFERENCE

everlastingly delicate did you dear dad forget heaven is omnipotent
 that vengeful wrath of the prime mover swaying like a copy around the
 next cloud down by my river dad DOWN BY MY RIVER ON MY WAY TO YOU I
 NEED TO KNOW -- did you see beyond the eye of the vulgar logic? you
 subtle breached biped poor unfriended dyspeptical bashful mortal MAN
 the last laugh the cancer got your systems kerplunk kaput oh my god
 dear daddio down by the river i want to kiss you i want to hold your
 boney body in my young unhappy arms my hopeless heart pounding against
 your skull i don't care about your femoral vein clamped for better
 drainage or the wrinkled skin on your neck the sinking inward lips the
 sockets sunk dissolution of dad i don't care i find fluid burns brown
 like parchment all over your chest and your jaw tumbled bellyward and
 backward they've clamped your chin and plugged it with cotton wool i
 don't care down by the river/ have they exposed and divided your car-
 toid artery, i don't care, i don't care i've got an idea of you and i
 image i image you i do and that's your reality beyond your body in
Madill's Funeral Parlour tucked in your satin casket

WHEN you are not, dear dealer dad dead, what will there be? will
 there be me? is there only me when i am and no me for you when you are
 not? what am i to do walking to you dad four grey-fearing days and
 lives sweaty with money I NEED THE SUN MORE THAN I NEED MONEY i need
 your manperson does your shit stink? does your bum hum when you come
 huh? do you get bad breath? do you see the sun pop? what'll i ask
 you by proxy down off the road so close to Colme Dad that i'm weary to
 be part way? that i'm wondering what you FELT pushing into Katherine
 woman her body closing around you and sucking me out of you were you

thinking LET GO! let go! how many times before i took? did you feel me
 throttling to life was i just a gurgle gush ahhh one more for the road
 i know you cry ERNIE old boy KATHERINE wrinkled around her eyes but she
 was bloated when they got her out/ you cried tears nearby dad but she
 was bloated by it all/ you cried tears/ not able to hold the variables
 at bay she died, Mr. Giffen, two days before you even knew; i'm not
 conscious of her dying i'm alive and dead she's dying died is that
 what tumbled through your head LISTEN TO ME I'M THINKING TO YOU --
 precarious hold, eh dad? on our lives, yours and mine, and can i
 imagine man never is but always is to be? you and i were too nervous
 the possibilities when you're young i told Elaine this morning isn't
 that what you were thinking when the time came a TIME MOMENT A FLASH
 AN INSTANT came and went did you let your last chance go to let go?
 the end sliding in on you like a boa constrictor surrounding your body
 cranking it to gobble up your bones some sleazy snake oozing in on you
 did you let go? FATHER sire me/ abandon me to the moment/ let me be/
 in the last flash were you alert to the last speck of light ten the
 last sound perhaps a nurse farting nine the radiator snorting the
 window rattling eight the room whooshing around up up away spreading
 out away from you your eyes/ears/nose/fingers/tongue like tentacles no?
 no! i won't let it go seven sailing out away from you leaving you to
 collapse into yourself six the world from which god is absent where
 where am i going five is it going? a going? oh dear dealer dad there's
 no bargain four at the end is that what you learned three the whole
 universe receding from you don't let me go don't abandon me ME two
 meeEEEEEE what about me? did you rave, dad? oh did you rave? one/

the devil in the forest grabbing you and shoving you back i know you
 ran after it, the IT, the IS, the IT'S didn't you father ZERO what
 was ZERO NOTHING VOID was it all shadow and rumblings to the last
 fragment of consciousness oh to feel a pain any pain anything in the
 last instant I HAVE BEEN ALIVE I HAVE to remember to carry any
 of it to the coming dark and silence the enduring silence

the river is silent i'm sure i'm falling to all fours deep in my
 wooded landscape with garbage rolling forkings and continuations like
 an incredible POSSIBILITY i'm not dead let the river roar on back in
 on itself i'll hobble like a lame dog to Elizabeth's house my end's
 pretty far to the future FAR distant linearly FAR AWAY statistically
 probable oh what shall my eyes of flesh my eyes of fire see there i'm
 walking into life stumbling over these rivery roads OUCH says a stone
 you're hurting me i'll walk more carefully i say, i shall walk more
 carefully i'll try not to meddle i'll keep still, not looking not
 hearing but they impinge anyway QUIT rustling leaves quit blinking at
 me stars at MEEEEEE, mee, dusty wormy mee i see i reflect i am important
 you trees and stars and stones i am aware of you see you i talk to my-
 self about you shadows in the dark there there aren't even stars to
 see but i know you're there above those clouds i can't see the clouds
 grey-dark overcast mess in the sky i remember starry nights i remember
 i reflect i send my roots down deeper i remember what i have not seen
 i remember what dead dad has seen i remember and i want a chance a
 chance my chance gladly i'll relinquish my roads and walk oh how i'll
 walk and walk and work i want a chance to be at ease with the land i'm

on the i hear the river how long can this bank go on? this trail?
 i shall have courage ignore the fatigue and chills the dark thick
 inky dark alone who knows me here? not the trees, not the river,
 not the sky, i'm Ford Percy Giffen B.A. S.I.N 420240830 i'm nearly
 mid-night near Elizabeth's house out on 86 i'm near Colme i'm near
 Blyth i'm on the third planet from the sun, one sun in millions in
 galaxies in millions i'm d.l. S1418 . . . i'm going north, alone,
 alone, to Colme i have no audience no documentors so inky dark for
 such a sad funeral what mildewed scraps of teased out knowledge will
 ease me here so near the highway i salute life i let life soothe me a-
 way from death i can walk can feel my muscles my legs my body moving
 through/ with the path the road should be coming and with the road
 the part-mile to Elizabeth's house to the rendezvous to Elizabeth-
 Elaine-Ernie the mad props and talk of the sad funeral i'll watch
 you dad watch you your systemless in time and space fading fading
 fading heard no more/ no fretting no jumping humping thumping running
 racing gliding crying tumble through the days of sun and dark i'll
 see you polished like a model to make me forget the OFF to see it as
 a vague relaxed ON isn't he happier how? oh yes, he looks well, HE HE
 HE is not he he is not he-ing i'll have the images father the afterglow
 of movement i'm so very very alive now this air around me getting cooler
 i feel it partly/ my running the fences near the river silhouettes please
 me as i pass them dark lines and shadings holding the fields back from
 falling grain by grain into the sea into the sea to rise inch by inch
 in mountains to crumble by/ and this night the off of on-off-day-night-
 all-at-once-he-is-not-now-used-to-be-was-then-is-all-one i'll lead you

to the river to hear the silent indifferent movement no laws no
 immutable laws will fix we'll watch it in the dark and imagine nights
 when we could have watched would you though dead dad dear interrupt
 your off that strange new journey to watch with me at this place can
 you love the time and space that rot your sockets because time and
 space must do just that i say hey dad ask that crazy bitter landscape
 to produce to PRODUCE for you for me while we last with the grass
 around us while we PRODUCE for the crazy landscape as well while we
 last with the grass while we forget like sedentary souls and memories
 pull our heads down to our knees and one instant we'll let the voices
 fade *the grand Mart and Emporium of the Western World* we'll wait the
 present our enduring consuming future/ some sure unity in waiting
 pushing past and future aside patient with wakes and empire visions
 things poking out of the ground patient oh shall i do many things while
 i wait? shall i, many things? while i wait? whatever chant i sing
 wherever on this path turned now into concrete road No. 86 whatever
 prayer i sing i'm here in the starting rain and that's all there is
 my life measured in centuries in centuries no birds, past midnight
 toward a dawn along the highway in new rain moving east . . .

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